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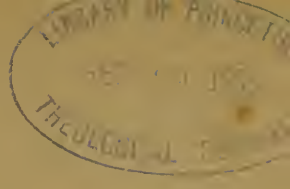
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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTERS I, TO XII., VERSE 17.

BY
ALEXANDER MACLAREN

D.D., LITT.D.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE ASCENSION (Acts i. 1-14)	1
THE THEME OF ACTS (Acts i. 1, 2; xxviii. 30, 31)	8
THE FORTY DAYS (Acts i. 3)	18
THE UNKNOWN TO-MORROW (Acts i. 7)	23
THE APOSTOLIC WITNESSES (Acts i. 21, 22)	28
THE ABIDING GIFT AND ITS TRANSITORY ACCOMPANIMENTS (Acts ii. 1-13)	42
THE FOURFOLD SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT (Acts ii. 2, 3, 17; 1 John ii. 20)	48
PETER'S FIRST SERMON (Acts ii. 32-47)	59
THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME (Acts ii. 36)	67
A FOURFOLD CORD (Acts ii. 42)	79
A PURE CHURCH AN INCREASING CHURCH (Acts ii. 47)	88

	PAGE
'THEN SHALL THE LAME MAN LEAP AS AN HART' (Acts iii. 1-16)	98
'THE PRINCE OF LIFE' (Acts iii. 14, 15)	104
THE HEALING POWER OF THE NAME (Acts iii. 16)	111
THE SERVANT OF THE LORD (Acts iii. 26)	120
THE FIRST BLAST OF TEMPEST (Acts iv. 1-14)	129
WITH AND LIKE CHRIST (Acts iv. 13)	136
OBEDIENT DISOBEDIENCE (Acts iv. 19-31)	145
IMPOSSIBLE SILENCE (Acts iv. 20)	153
THE SERVANT AND THE SLAVES (Acts iv. 25, 27, 29)	163
THE WHEAT AND THE TARES (Acts iv. 32; v. 11)	172
WHOM TO OBEY,—ANNAS OR ANGEL? (Acts v. 17-32)	179
OUR CAPTAIN (Acts v. 31)	186
GAMALIEL'S COUNSEL (Acts v. 33, 39)	196
FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (Acts vi. 3, 5, 8)	203
STEPHEN'S VISION (Acts vii. 56)	212
THE YOUNG SAUL AND THE AGED PAUL (Acts vii. 58; Philemon 9)	217

CONTENTS

vii

PAGE

THE DEATH OF THE MASTER AND THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT (Acts vii. 59, 60)	226
SEED SCATTERED AND TAKING ROOT (Acts viii. 1-17)	235
SIMON THE SORCERER (Acts viii. 21)	242
A MEETING IN THE DESERT (Acts viii. 26-40)	248
PHILIP THE EVANGELIST (Acts viii. 40)	255
GRACE TRIUMPHANT (Acts ix. 1-12; 17-20)	263
‘THIS WAY’ (Acts ix. 2)	269
A BIRD’S-EYE VIEW OF THE EARLY CHURCH (Acts ix. 31)	280
COPIES OF CHRIST’S MANNER (Acts ix. 34, 40)	288
WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSSED (Acts x. 1-20)	295
‘GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS’ (Acts x. 30-44)	303
PETER’S APOLOGIA (Acts xi. 1-18)	310
THE FIRST PREACHING AT ANTIOCH (Acts xi. 20, 21)	315
THE EXHORTATION OF BARNABAS (Acts xi. 23)	323
WHAT A GOOD MAN IS, AND HOW HE BECOMES SO (Acts xi. 24).	343
A NICKNAME ACCEPTED (Acts xi. 26)	354

	PAGE
THE MARTYRDOM OF JAMES (Acts xii. 2) . . .	366
PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON (Acts xii. 5, R.V.) .	373
THE ANGEL'S TOUCH (Acts xii. 7, 23) . . .	380
'SOBER CERTAINTY' (Acts xii. 11) . . .	383
RHODA (Acts xii. 13) . . .	386
PETER AFTER HIS ESCAPE (Acts xii. 17) . . .	394

THE ASCENSION

'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2. Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen: 3. To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. 5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. 6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7. And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. 8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. 12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey. 13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.'—Acts i. 1-14.

THE Ascension is twice narrated by Luke. The life begun by the supernatural birth ends with the supernatural Ascension, which sets the seal of Heaven on Christ's claims and work. Therefore the Gospel ends with it. But it is also the starting-point of the Christ's heavenly activity, of which the growth of His Church, as recorded in the Acts, is the issue. Therefore the Book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with it.

The keynote of the 'treatise' lies in the first words, which describe the Gospel as the record of what 'Jesus

began to do and teach.' Luke would have gone on to say that this second book of his contained the story of what Jesus went on to do and teach after He was 'taken up,' if he had been strictly accurate, or had carried out his first intention, as shown by the mould of his introductory sentence; but he is swept on into the full stream of his narrative, and we have to infer the contrast between his two volumes from his statement of the contents of his first.

The book, then, is misnamed Acts of the Apostles, both because the greater number of the Apostles do nothing in it, and because, in accordance with the hint of the first verse, Christ Himself is the doer of all, as comes out distinctly in many places where the critical events of the Church's progress and extension are attributed to 'the Lord.' In one aspect, Christ's work on earth was finished on the Cross; in another, that finished work is but the beginning both of His doing and teaching. Therefore we are not to regard His teaching while on earth as the completion of Christian revelation. To set aside the Epistles on the plea that the Gospels contain Christ's own teaching, while the Epistles are only Paul's or John's, is to misconceive the relation between the earthly and the heavenly activity of Jesus.

The statement of the theme of the book is followed by a brief summary of the events between the Resurrection and Ascension. Luke had spoken of these in the end of his Gospel, but given no note of time, and run together the events of the day of the Resurrection and of the following weeks, so that it might appear, as has been actually contended that he meant, that the Ascension took place on the very day of Resurrection. The fact that in this place he gives more detailed statements, and tells how long elapsed between the

Resurrection Sunday and the Ascension, might have taught hasty critics that an author need not be ignorant of what he does not mention, and that a detailed account does not contradict a summary one, —truths which do not seem very recondite, but have often been forgotten by very learned commentators.

Three points are signalised as occupying the forty days: commandments were given, Christ's actual living presence was demonstrated (by sight, touch, hearing, etc.), and instructions concerning the kingdom were imparted. The old blessed closeness and continuity of companionship had ceased. Our Lord's appearances were now occasional. He came to the disciples, they knew not whence; He withdrew from them, they knew not whither. Apparently a sacred awe restrained them from seeking to detain Him or to follow Him. Their hearts would be full of strangely mingled feelings, and they were being taught by gentle degrees to do without Him. Not only a divine decorum, but a most gracious tenderness, dictated the alternation of presence and absence during these days.

The instructions then given are again referred to in Luke's Gospel, and are there represented as principally directed to opening their minds 'that they might understand the Scriptures.' The main thing about the kingdom which they had then to learn, was that it was founded on the death of Christ, who had fulfilled all the Old Testament predictions. Much remained untaught, which after years were to bring to clear knowledge; but from the illumination shed during these fruitful days flowed the remarkable vigour and confidence of the Apostolic appeal to the prophets, in the first conflicts of the Church with the rulers. Christ is the King of the kingdom, and His Cross is His

throne,—these truths being grasped revolutionised the Apostles' conceptions. They are as needful for us.

From verse 4 onwards the last interview seems to be narrated. Probably it began in the city, and ended on the slopes of Olivet. There was a solemn summoning together of the Eleven, which is twice referred to (vs. 4, 6). What awe of expectancy would rest on the group as they gathered round Him, perhaps half suspecting that it was for the last time! His words would change the suspicion into certainty, for He proceeded to tell them what they were not to do and to do, when left alone. The tone of leave-taking is unmistakable.

The prohibition against leaving Jerusalem implies that they would have done so if left to themselves; and it would have been small wonder if they had been eager to hurry back to quiet Galilee, their home, and to shake from their feet the dust of the city where their Lord had been slain. Truly they would feel like sheep in the midst of wolves when He had gone, and Pharisees and priests and Roman officers ringed them round. No wonder if, like a shepherdless flock, they had broken and scattered! But the theocratic importance of Jerusalem, and the fact that nowhere else could the Apostles secure such an audience for their witness, made their 'beginning at Jerusalem' necessary. So they were to crush their natural longing to get back to Galilee, and to stay in their dangerous position. We have all to ask, not where we should be most at ease, but where we shall be most efficient as witnesses for Christ, and to remember that very often the presence of adversaries makes the door 'great and effectual.'

These eleven poor men were not left by their Master with a hard task and no help. He bade them 'wait' for

the promised Holy Spirit, the coming of whom they had heard from Him when in the upper room He spoke to them of 'the Comforter.' They were too feeble to act alone, and silence and retirement were all that He enjoined till they had been plunged into the fiery baptism which should quicken, strengthen, and transform them.

The order in which promise and command occur here shows how graciously Jesus considered the Apostles' weakness. Not a word does He say of their task of witnessing, till He has filled their hearts with the promise of the Spirit. He shows them the armour of power in which they are to be clothed, before He points them to the battlefield. Waiting times are not wasted times. Over-eagerness to rush into work, especially into conspicuous and perilous work, is sure to end in defeat. Till we feel the power coming into us, we had better be still.

The promise of this great gift, the nature of which they but dimly knew, set the Apostles' expectations on tiptoe, and they seem to have thought that their reception of it was in some way the herald of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. So it was, but in a very different fashion from their dream. They had not learned so much from the forty days' instructions concerning the kingdom as to be free from their old Jewish notions, which colour their question, 'Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' They believed that Jesus could establish His kingdom when He would. They were right, and also wrong,—right, for He is King; wrong, for its establishment is not to be effected by a single act of power, but by the slow process of preaching the gospel.

Our Lord does not deal with their misconceptions

which could only be cured by time and events; but He lays down great principles, which we need as much as the Eleven did. The 'times and seasons,' the long stretches of days, and the critical epoch-making moments, are known to God only; our business is, not to speculate curiously about these, but to do the plain duty which is incumbent on the Church at all times. The perpetual office of Christ's people to be His witnesses, their equipment for that function (namely, the power of the Holy Spirit coming on them), and the sphere of their work (namely, in ever-widening circles, Jerusalem, Samaria, and the whole world), are laid down, not for the first hearers only, but for all ages and for each individual, in these last words of the Lord as He stood on Olivet, ready to depart.

The calm simplicity of the account of the Ascension is remarkable. So great an event told in such few, unimpassioned words! Luke's Gospel gives the further detail that it was in the act of blessing with uplifted hands that our Lord was parted from the Eleven. Two expressions are here used to describe the Ascension, one of which ('was taken up') implies that He was passive, the other of which ('He went') implies that He was active. Both are true. As in the accounts of the Resurrection He is sometimes said to have been raised, and sometimes to have risen, so here. The Father took the Son back to the glory, the Son left the world and went to the Father. No chariot of fire, no whirlwind, was needed to lift Him to the throne. Elijah was carried by such agency into a sphere new to him; Jesus ascended up where He was before.

No other mode of departure from earth would have corresponded to His voluntary, supernatural birth. He

carried manhood up to the throne of God. The cloud which received Him while yet He was well within sight of the gazers was probably that same bright cloud, the symbol of the Divine Presence, which of old dwelt between the cherubim. His entrance into it visibly symbolised the permanent participation, then begun, of His glorified manhood in the divine glory.

Most true to human nature is that continued gaze upwards after He had passed into the hiding brightness of the glory-cloud. How many of us know what it is to look long at the spot on the horizon where the last glint of sunshine struck the sails of the ship that bore dear ones away from us! It was fitting that angels, who had heralded His birth and watched His grave, should proclaim His Second Coming to earth.

It was gracious that, in the moment of keenest sense of desolation and loss, the great hope of reunion should be poured into the hearts of the Apostles. Nothing can be more distinct and assured than the terms of that angel message. It gives for the faith and hope of all ages the assurance that He will come; that He who comes will be the very Jesus who went; that His coming will be, like His departure, visible, corporeal, local. He will bring again all His tenderness, all His brother's heart, all His divine power, and will gather His servants to Himself.

No wonder that, with such hopes flowing over the top of their sorrow, like oil on troubled waters, the little group went back to the upper room, hallowed by memories of the Last Supper, and there waited in prayer and supplication during the ten days which elapsed till Pentecost. So should we use the interval between any promise and its fulfilment. Patient

expectation, believing prayer, harmonious association with our brethren, will prepare us for receiving the gift of the Spirit, and will help to equip us as witnesses for Jesus.

THE THEME OF ACTS

'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2. Until the day in which He was taken up.'—Acts i. 1, 2.

'And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.'—Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

So begins and so ends this Book. I connect the commencement and the close, because I think that the juxtaposition throws great light upon the purpose of the writer, and suggests some very important lessons. The reference to 'the former treatise' (which is, of course, the Gospel according to Luke) implies that this Book is to be regarded as its sequel, and the terms of the reference show the writer's own conception of what he was going to do in his second volume. 'The former treatise have I made . . . of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up.' Is not the natural inference that the latter treatise will tell us what Jesus *continued* 'to do and teach' *after* He was taken up? I think so. And thus the writer sets forth at once, for those that have eyes to see, what he means to do, and what he thinks his book is going to be about.

So, then, the name 'The Acts of the Apostles,' which is not coeval with the book itself, is somewhat of a misnomer. Most of the Apostles are never heard of in it. There are, at the most, only three or four of them concerning whom anything in the book is recorded.

But our first text supplies a deeper reason for regarding that title as inadequate, and even misleading. For, if the theme of the story be what Christ did, then the book is, not the 'Acts of the *Apostles*,' but the 'Acts of *Jesus Christ*' through His servants. He, and He alone, is the Actor; and the men who appear in it are but instruments in His hands, He alone being the mover of the pawns on the board.

That conception of the purpose of the book seems to me to have light cast upon it by, and to explain, the singular abruptness of its conclusion, which must strike every reader. No doubt it is quite possible that the reason why the book ends in such a singular fashion, planting Paul in Rome, and leaving him there, may be that the date of its composition was that imprisonment of Paul in the Imperial City, in a part of which, at all events, we know that Luke was his companion. But, whilst that consideration may explain the point at which the book stops, it does not explain the way in which it stops. The historian lays down his pen, possibly because he had brought his narrative up to date. But a word of conclusion explaining that it was so would have been very natural, and its absence must have had some reason. It is also possible that the arrival of the Apostle in the Imperial City, and his unhindered liberty of preaching there, in the very centre of power, the focus of intellectual life, and the hot-bed of corruption for the known world, may have seemed to the writer an epoch which rounded off his story. But I think that the reason for the abruptness of the record's close is to be found in the continuity of the work of which it tells a part. It is the unfinished record of an incomplete work. The theme is the work of Christ through the ages, of which each successive

depository of His energies can do but a small portion, and must leave that portion unfinished; the book does not so much end as stop. It is a fragment, because the work of which it tells is not yet a whole.

If, then, we put these two things—the beginning and the ending of the Acts—together, I think we get some thoughts about what Christ began to do and teach on earth; what He continues to do and teach in heaven; and how small and fragmentary a share in that work each individual servant of His has. Let us look at these points briefly.

I. First, then, we have here the suggestion of what Christ began to do and teach on earth.

Now, at first sight, the words of our text seem to be in strange and startling contradiction to the solemn cry which rang out of the darkness upon Calvary. Jesus said, ‘It is finished!’ and ‘gave up the ghost.’ Luke says He ‘began to do and teach.’ Is there any contradiction between the two? Certainly not. It is one thing to lay a foundation; it is another thing to build a house. And the work of laying the foundation must be finished before the work of building the structure upon it can be begun. It is one thing to create a force; it is another thing to apply it. It is one thing to compound a medicine; it is another thing to administer it. It is one thing to unveil a truth; it is another to unfold its successive applications, and to work it into a belief and practice in the world. The former is the work of Christ which was finished on earth; the latter is the work which is continuous throughout the ages.

‘He began to do and teach,’ not in the sense that any should come after Him and do, as the disciples of most great discoverers and thinkers have had to do:

namely, systematise, rectify, and complete the first glimpses of truth which the master had given. 'He began to do and teach,' not in the sense that after He had 'passed into the heavens' any new truth or force can for evermore be imparted to humanity in regard of the subjects which He taught and the energies which He brought. But whilst thus His work is complete, His earthly work is also initial. And we must remember that whatever distinction my text may mean to draw between the work of Christ in the past and that in the present and the future, it does not mean to imply that when He 'ascended up on high' He had not completed the task for which He came, or that the world had to wait for anything more, either from Him or from others, to eke out the imperfections of His doctrine or the insufficiencies of His work.

Let us ever remember that the initial work of Christ on earth is complete in so far as the revelation of God to men is concerned. There will be no other. There is needed no other. Nothing more is possible than what He, by His words and by His life, by His gentleness and His grace, by His patience and His Passion, has unveiled to all men, of the heart and character of God. The revelation is complete, and he that professes to add anything to, or to substitute anything for, the finished teaching of Jesus Christ concerning God, and man's relation to God, and man's duty, destiny, and hopes, is a false teacher, and to follow him is fatal. All that ever come after Him and say, 'Here is something that Christ has not told you,' are thieves and robbers, 'and the sheep will not hear them.'

In like manner that work of Christ, which in some sense is initial, is complete as Redemption. 'This Man

has offered up one sacrifice for sins for ever.' And nothing more can He do than He has done; and nothing more can any man or all men do than was accomplished on the Cross of Calvary as giving a revelation, as effecting a redemption, as lodging in the heart of humanity, and in the midst of the stream of human history, a purifying energy, sufficient to cleanse the whole black stream. The past work which culminated on the Cross, and was sealed as adequate and accepted of God in the Resurrection and Ascension, needs no supplement, and can have no continuation, world without end. And so, whatever may be the meaning of that singular phrase, 'began to do and teach,' it does not, in the smallest degree, conflict with the assurance that He hath ascended up on high, 'having obtained eternal redemption for us,' and 'having finished the work which the Father gave Him to do.'

II. But then, secondly, we have to notice what Christ continues to do and to teach after His Ascension.

I have already suggested that the phraseology of the first of my texts naturally leads to the conclusion that the theme of this Book of the Acts is the continuous work of the ascended Saviour, and that the language is not forced by being thus interpreted is very plain to any one who will glance even cursorily over the contents of the book itself. For there is nothing in it more obvious and remarkable than the way in which, at every turn in the narrative, all is referred to Jesus Christ Himself.

For instance, to cull one or two cases in order to bring the matter more plainly before you—When the Apostles determined to select another Apostle to fill Judas' place, they asked Jesus Christ to show which 'of these two Thou hast chosen.' When Peter is called

upon to explain the tongues at Pentecost he says, 'Jesus hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.' When the writer would tell the reason of the large first increase to the Church, he says, 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.' Peter and John go into the Temple to heal the lame man, and their words to him are, 'Do not think that our power or holiness is any factor in your cure. The Name hath made this man whole.' It is the Lord that appears to Paul and to Ananias, to the one on the road to Damascus and to the other in the city. It is the Lord to whom Peter refers Æneas when he says, 'Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' It was the Lord that 'opened the heart of Lydia.' It was the Lord that appeared to Paul in Corinth, and said to him, 'I have much people in this city'; and again, when in the prison at Jerusalem, He assured the Apostle that he would be carried to Rome. And so, at every turn in the narrative, we find that Christ is presented as influencing men's hearts, operating upon outward events, working miracles, confirming His word, leading His servants, and prescribing for them their paths, and all which they do is done by the hand of the Lord with them confirming the word which they spoke. Jesus Christ is the Actor, and He only is the Actor; men are His implements and instruments.

The same point of view is suggested by another of the characteristics of this book, which it shares in common with all Scripture narratives, and that is the stolid indifference with which it picks up and drops men, according to the degree in which, for the moment, they are the instruments of Christ's power. Supposing a man had been writing Acts of the Apostles, do you think it would have been possible that of the greater

number of them he should not say a word, that concerning those of whom he does speak he should deal with them as this book does, barely mentioning the martyrdom of James, one of the four chief Apostles; allowing Peter to slip out of the narrative after the great meeting of the Church at Jerusalem; letting Philip disappear without a hint of what he did thereafter; lodging Paul in Rome and leaving him there, with no account of his subsequent work or martyrdom? Such phenomena—and they might be largely multiplied—are only explicable upon one hypothesis. As long as electricity streams on the carbon point it glows and is visible, but when the current is turned to another lamp we see no more of the bit of carbon. As long as God uses a man the man is of interest to the writers of the Scriptures. When God uses another one, they drop the first, and have no more care about him, because their theme is not men and their doings, but God's doings through men.

On us, and in us, and by us, and for us, if we are His servants, Jesus Christ is working all through the ages. He is the Lord of Providence, He is the King of history, in His hand is the book with the seven seals; He sends His Spirit, and where His Spirit is He is; and what His Spirit does He does. And thus He continues to teach and to work from His throne in the heavens.

He continues to teach, not by the communication of new truth. That is finished. The volume of Revelation is complete. The last word of the divine utterances hath been spoken until that final word which shall end Time and crumble the earth. But the application of the completed Revelation, the unfolding of all that is wrapped in germ in it; the growing of the seed into a tree, the realisation more completely by individuals

and communities of the principles and truths which Jesus Christ has brought us by His life and His death—that is the work that is going on to-day, and that will go on till the end of the world. For the old Puritan belief is true, though the modern rationalistic mutilations of it are false, ‘God hath more light yet to break forth’—and our modern men stop there. But what the sturdy old Puritan said was, ‘more light yet to break forth from His holy Word.’ Jesus Christ teaches the ages—through the lessons of providence and the communication of His Spirit to His Church—to understand what He gave the world when He was here.

In like manner He works. The foundation is laid, the healing medicine is prepared, the cleansing element is cast into the mass of humanity; what remains is the application and appropriation, and incorporation in conduct, of the redeeming powers that Jesus Christ has brought. And that work is going on, and will go on, till the end.

Now these truths of our Lord’s continuous activity in teaching and working from heaven may yield us some not unimportant lessons. What a depth and warmth and reality the thoughts give to the Christian’s relation to Jesus Christ! We have to look back to that Cross as the foundation of all our hope. Yes! But we have to think, not only of a Christ who did something for us long ago in the past, and there an end, but of a Christ who to-day lives and reigns, ‘to do and to teach’ according to our necessities. What a sweetness and sacredness such thoughts impart to all external events, which we may regard as being the operation of His love, and as moved by the hands that were nailed to the Cross for us, and now hold the sceptre of the universe for the blessing of mankind! What a fountain of hope they

open in estimating future probabilities of victory for truth and goodness! The forces of good and evil in the world seem very disproportionate, but we forget too often to take Christ into account. It is not *we* that have to fight against evil; at the best we are but the sword which Christ wields, and all the power is in the hand that wields it. Great men die, good men die; Jesus Christ is not dead. Paul was martyred: Jesus lives; He is the anchor of our hope. We see miseries and mysteries enough, God knows. The prospects of all good causes seem often clouded and dark. The world has an awful power of putting drags upon all chariots that bear blessings, and of turning to evil every good. You cannot diffuse education, but you diffuse the taste for rubbish and something worse, in the shape of books. No good thing but has its shadow of evil attendant upon it. And if we had only to estimate by visible or human forces, we might well sit down and wrap ourselves in the sackcloth of pessimism. 'We see not yet all things put under Him'; but 'we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour,' and the vision that cheered the first martyr—of Christ 'standing at the right hand of God'—is the rebuke of every fear and every gloomy anticipation for ourselves or for the world.

What a lesson of lowliness and of diligence it gives us! The jangling church at Corinth fought about whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas was the man to lead the Church, and the experience has been repeated over and over again. 'Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. Be not puffed up one against another. Be not wise in your own conceits.' You are only a tool, only a pawn in the hand of the Great

Player. If you have anything, it is because you get it from Him. See that you use it, and do not boast about it. Jesus Christ is the Worker, the only Worker; the Teacher, the only Teacher. All our wisdom is derived, all our light is enkindled. We are but the reeds through which His breath makes music. And 'shall the axe boast itself,' either 'against' or apart from 'Him that heweth therewith'?

III. Lastly, we note the incompleteness of each man's share in the great work.

As I said, the book which is to tell the story of Christ's continuous unfinished work must stop abruptly. There is no help for it. If it was a history of Paul it would need to be wound up to an end and a selvage put to it, but as it is the history of Christ's working, the web is not half finished, and the shuttle stops in the middle of a cast. The book must be incomplete, because the work of which it is the record does not end until 'He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to the Father, and God shall be all in all.'

So the work of each man is but a fragment of that great work. Every man inherits unfinished tasks from his predecessors, and leaves unfinished tasks to his successors. It is, as it used to be in the Middle Ages, when the hands that dug the foundations, or laid the first courses, of some great cathedral, were dead long generations before the gilded cross was set on the apex of the needlespire, and the glowing glass filled in to the painted windows. Enough for us, if we lay a stone, though it be but one stone in one of the courses of the great building.

Luke has left plenty of blank paper at the end of his second 'treatise,' on which he meant that succeeding generations should write their partial contributions to

the completed work. Dear friends, let us see that we write our little line, as monks in their monasteries used to keep the chronicle of the house, on which scribe after scribe toiled at its illuminated letters with loving patience for a little while, and then handed the pen from his dying hand to another. What does it matter though we drop, having done but a fragment? He gathers up the fragments into His completed work, and the imperfect services which He enabled any of us to do will all be represented in the perfect circle of His finished work. The Lord help us to be faithful to the power that works in us, and to leave Him to incorporate our fragments in His mighty whole!

THE FORTY DAYS

‘To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.’—Acts i. 3.

THE forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension have distinctly marked characteristics. They are unlike to the period before them in many respects, but completely similar in others; they have a preparatory character throughout; they all bear on the future work of the disciples, and hearten them for the time when they should be left alone.

The words of the text give us their leading features. They bring out—

I. Their evidential value, as confirming the fact of the Resurrection.

‘He showed Himself alive after His passion by . . . proofs.’

By sight, repeated, to individuals, to companies, to Mary in her solitary sadness, to Peter the penitent, to

the two on the road to Emmaus. At all hours : in the evening when the doors were shut ; in the morning ; in grey twilight ; in daytime on the road. At many places—in houses, out of doors.

The signs of true corporeity—the sight, the eating.

The signs of bodily identity,—‘Reach hither thy hand.’ ‘He showed them His hands and His side.’

Was this the glorified body ?

The affirmative answer is usually rested on the facts that He was not known by Mary or the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and that He came into the upper room when the doors were shut. But the force of these facts is broken by remembering that Mary saw nothing about Him unlike other men, but supposed Him to be the gardener—which puts the idea of a glorified body out of the question, and leaves us to suppose that she was full of weeping indifference to any one.

Then as to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke carefully tells us that the reason why they did not know Him was *in them* and not in Him—that it was ‘because their eyes were holden,’ not because His body was changed.

And as to His coming when the doors were shut, why should not that be like the other miracles, when ‘He conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in the place,’ and when He walked on the waters ?

There cannot then be anything decidedly built on these facts, and the considerations on the other side are very strong. Surely the whole drift of the narrative goes in the direction of representing Christ’s ‘glory’ as beginning with His Ascension, and consequently the ‘body of His glory’ as being then assumed. Further, the argument of 1 Cor. xv. goes on the assumption that

'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, that the material corporeity is incongruous with, and incapable of entrance into, the conditions of that future life, and, by parity of reasoning, that the spiritual body, which is to be conformed to the body of Christ's glory, is incongruous with, and incapable of entrance into, the conditions of this earthly life. As is the environment, so must be the 'body' that is at home in it.

Further, the facts of our Lord's eating and drinking after His Resurrection are not easily reconcilable with the contention that He was then invested with the glorified body.

We must, then, think of transfiguration, rather than of resurrection only, as the way by which He passed into the heavens. He 'slept,' but woke, and, as He ascended, was 'changed.'

II. The renewal of the old bond by the tokens of His unchanged disposition.

Recall the many beautiful links with the past: the message to Peter; that to Mary; 'Tell My brethren,' 'He was known in breaking of bread,' 'Peace be with you!' (repetition from John xvii.), the miraculous draught of fishes, and the meal and conversation afterwards, recalling the miracle at the beginning of the closer association of the four Apostles of the first rank with their Lord. The forty days revealed the old heart, the old tenderness. He remembers all the past. He sends a message to the penitent; He renews to the faithful the former gift of 'peace.'

How precious all this is as a revelation of the impotence of death in regard to Him and us! It assures us of the perpetuity of His love. He showed Himself after His passion as the same old Self, the same old tender Lover. His appearances then prepare us for the last vision of

Him in the Apocalypse, in which we see His perpetual humanity, His perpetual tenderness, and hear Him saying: 'I am . . . the Living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.'

These forty days assure us of the narrow limits of the power of death. Love lives through death, memory lives through it. Christ has lived through it and comes up from the grave, serene and tender, with unruffled peace, with all the old tones of tenderness in the voice that said 'Mary!' So may we be sure that through death and after it we shall live and be ourselves. We, too, shall show ourselves alive after we have experienced the superficial change of death.

III. The change in Christ's relations to the disciples and to the world. 'Appearing unto them by the space of forty days.'

The words mark a contrast to Christ's former constant intercourse with the disciples. This is occasional; He appears at intervals during the forty days. He comes amongst them and disappears. He is seen again in the morning light by the lake-side and goes away. He tells them to come and meet Him in Galilee. That intermittent presence prepared the disciples for His departure. It was painful and educative. It carried out His own word, 'And now I am no more in the world.'

We observe in the disciples traces of a deeper awe. They say little. 'Master!' 'My Lord and my God!' 'None durst ask Him, Who art Thou?' Even Peter ventures only on 'Lord, Thou knowest all things,' and on one flash of the old familiarity: 'What shall this man do?' John, who recalls very touchingly, in that appendix to his Gospel, the blessed time when he leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, now only humbly follows, while the

others sit still and awed, by that strange fire on the banks of the lonely lake.

A clearer vision of the Lord on their parts, a deeper sense of who He is, make them assume more of the attitude of worshippers, though not less that of friends. And He can no more dwell with them, and go in and out among them.

As for the world—‘It seeth Me no more, but ye see Me.’ He was ‘seen of *them*,’ not of others. There is no more appeal to the people, no more teaching, no more standing in the Temple. Why is this? Is it not the commentary on His own word on the Cross, ‘It is finished!’ marking most distinctly that His work on earth was ended when He died, and so confirming that conception of His earthly mission which sees its culmination and centre of power in the Cross?

IV. Instruction and prophecy for the future.

The preparation of the disciples for their future work and condition was a chief purpose of the forty days. Jesus spoke ‘of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.’ He also ‘gave commandments to the Apostles.’

Note how much there is, in His conversations with them—

1. Of opening to them the Scriptures. ‘Christ must needs suffer,’ etc.

2. Of lessons for their future, thus fitting them for their task.

3. Mark how this transitional period taught them that His going away was not to be sorrow and loss, but joy and gain. ‘Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended.’

Our present relation to the ascended Lord is as much an advance on that of the disciples to the risen Lord,

as that was on their relation to Him during His earthly life. They had more real communion with Him when, with opened hearts, they heard Him interpret the Scriptures concerning Himself, and fell at His feet crying 'My Lord and my God!' though they saw Him but for short seasons and at intervals, than when day by day they were with Him and knew Him not. As they grew in love and ripened in knowledge, they knew Him better and better.

For us, too, these forty days are full of blessed lessons, teaching us that real communion with Jesus is attained by faith in Him, and that He is still working in and for us, and is still present with us. The joy with which the disciples saw Him ascend should live on in us as we think of Him enthroned. The hope that the angels' message lit up in their hearts should burn in ours. The benediction which the Risen Lord uttered on those who have not seen and yet have believed falls in double measure on those who, though now they see Him not, yet believing rejoice in Jesus with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

THE UNKNOWN TO-MORROW

A New Year's Sermon

'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.'—ACTS i. 7.

THE New Testament gives little encouragement to a sentimental view of life. Its writers had too much to do, and too much besides to think about, for undue occupation with pensive remembrances or imaginative forecastings. They bid us remember as a stimulus to thanksgiving and a ground of hope. They bid us look forward, but not along the low levels of earth and its

changes. One great future is to draw all our longings and to fix our eyes, as the tender hues of the dawn kindle infinite yearnings in the soul of the gazer. What may come is all hidden; we can make vague guesses, but reach nothing more certain. Mist and cloud conceal the path in front of the portion which we are actually traversing, but when it climbs, it comes out clear from the fogs that hang about the flats. We can track it winding up to the throne of Christ. Nothing is certain, but the coming of the Lord and 'our gathering together to Him.'

The words of this text in their original meaning point only to the ignorance of the time of the end which Christ had been foretelling. But they may allow of a much wider application, and their lessons are in entire consonance with the whole tone of Scripture in regard to the future. We are standing now at the beginning of a New Year, and the influence of the season is felt in some degree by us all. Not for the sake of repressing any wise forecasting which has for its object our preparation for probable duties and exigencies; not for the purpose of repressing that trustful anticipation which, building on our past time and on God's eternity, fronts the future with calm confidence; not for the sake of discouraging that pensive and softened mood which if it does nothing more, at least delivers us for a moment from the tyrannous power of the present, do we turn to these words now; but that we may together consider how much they contain of cheer and encouragement, of stimulus to our duty, and of calming for our hearts in the prospect of a New Year. They teach us the limits of our care for the future, as they give us the limits of our knowledge of it. They teach us the best remedies for

all anxiety, the great thoughts that tranquillise us in our ignorance, viz. that all is in God's merciful hand, and that whatever may come, we have a divine power which will fit us for it; and they bid us anticipate our work and do it, as the best counterpoise for all vain curiosity about what may be coming on the earth.

I. The narrow limits of our knowledge of the future.

We are quite sure that we shall die. We are sure that a mingled web of joy and sorrow, light shot with dark, will be unrolled before us—but of anything more we are really ignorant. We know that certainly the great majority of us will be alive at the close of this New Year; but who will be the exceptions? A great many of us, especially those of us who are in the monotonous stretch of middle life, will go on substantially as we have been going on for years past, with our ordinary duties, joys, sorrows, cares; but to some of us, in all probability, this year holds some great change which may darken all our days or brighten them. In all our forward-looking there ever remains an element of uncertainty. The future fronts us like some statue beneath its canvas covering. Rolling mists hide it all, except here and there a peak.

I need not remind you how merciful and good it is that it is so. Therefore coming sorrows do not diffuse anticipatory bitterness as of tainted water percolating through gravel, and coming joys are not discounted, and the present has a reality of its own, and is not coloured by what is to come.

Then this being so—what is the wise course of conduct? Not a confident reckoning on to-morrow. There is nothing elevating in anticipation which paints the blank surface of the future with the same earthly colours as dye the present. There is no more complete

waste of time than that. Nor is proud self-confidence any wiser, which jauntily takes for granted that 'to-morrow will be as this day.' The conceit that things are to go on as they have been fools men into a dream of permanence which has no basis. Nor is the fearful apprehension of evil any wiser. How many people spoil the present gladness with thoughts of future sorrow, and cannot enjoy the blessedness of united love for thinking of separation!

In brief, it is wise to be but little concerned with the future, except—

1. In the way of taking reasonable precautions to prepare for its probabilities.

2. To fit ourselves for its duties.

One future we may contemplate. Our fault is not that we look forward, but that we do not look far enough forward. Why trouble with the world when we have heaven? Why look along the low level among the mists of earth and forests and swamps, when we can see the road climbing to the heights? Why be anxious about what three hundred and sixty-five days may bring, when we know what Eternity will bring? Why divert our God-given faculty of hope from its true object? Why torment ourselves with casting the fashion of uncertain evils, when we can enter into the great peace of looking for 'that blessed Hope'?

II. The safe Hands which keep the future.

'The Father hath put in His own power.' We have not to depend upon an impersonal Fate; nor upon a wild whirl of Chance; nor upon 'laws of averages,' 'natural laws,' 'tendencies' and 'spirit of the age'; nor even on a theistic Providence, but upon a Father who holds all things 'in His own power,' and wields all for us. So will not our way be made right?

Whatever the future may bring, it will be loving, paternal discipline. He shapes it all and keeps it in His hands. Why should we be anxious? That great name of 'Father' binds Him to tender, wise, disciplinary dealing, and should move us to calm and happy trust.

III. The sufficient strength to face the future.

'The power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you' is promised here to the disciples for a specific purpose; but it is promised and given to us all through Christ, if we will only take it. And in Him we shall be ready for all the future.

The Spirit of God is the true Interpreter of Providence. He calms our nature, and enlightens our understanding to grasp the meaning of all our experiences. The Spirit makes joy more blessed, by keeping us from undue absorption in it. The Spirit is the Comforter. The Spirit fits us for duty.

So be quite sure that nothing will come to you in your earthly future, which He does not Himself accompany to interpret it, and to make it pure blessing.

IV. The practical duty in view of the future.

(a) The great thing we ought to look to in the future is our work,—not what we shall enjoy or what we shall endure, but what we shall do. This is healthful and calming.

(b) The great remedy for morbid anticipation lies in regarding life as the opportunity for service. Never mind about the future, let it take care of itself. Work! That clears away cobwebs from our brains, as when a man wakes from troubled dreams, to hear 'the sweep of scythe in morning dew,' and the shout of the peasant as he trudges to his task, and the lowing of the cattle, and the clink of the hammer.

(c) The great work we have to do in the future is to

be witnesses for Christ. This is the meaning of all life; we can do it in joy and in sorrow, and we shall bear a charmed life till it be done. So the words of the text are a promise of preservation.

Then, dear brethren, how do you stand fronting that Unknown? How can you face it without going mad, unless you know God and trust Him as your Father through Christ? If you do, you need have no fear. To-morrow lies all dim and strange before you, but His gentle and strong hand is working in the darkness and He will shape it right. He will fit you to bear it all. If you regard it as your supreme duty and highest honour to be Christ's witness, you will be kept safe, 'delivered out of the mouth of the lion,' that by you 'the preaching may be fully known.'

If not, how dreary is that future to you, 'all dim and cheerless, like a rainy sea,' from which wild shapes may come up and devour you! Love and friendship will pass, honour and strength will fail, life will ebb away, and of all that once stretched before you, nothing will be left but one little strip of sand, fast jellying with the tide beneath your feet, and before you a wild unlighted ocean!

THE APOSTOLIC WITNESSES

'Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.'—ACTS i. 21, 22.

THE fact of Christ's Resurrection was the staple of the first Christian sermon recorded in this Book of the Acts of the Apostles. They did not deal so much in doctrine; they did not dwell very distinctly upon what we call, and rightly call, the atoning death of Christ;

but they proclaimed what they had seen with their eyes—that He died and rose again.

And not only was the main subject of their teaching the Resurrection, but it was the Resurrection in one of its aspects and for one specific purpose. There are, speaking roughly, three main connections in which the fact of Christ's rising from the dead is viewed in Scripture, and these three successively emerge in the consciousness of the Early Church.

It was, first, a fact affecting Him, a testimony concerning Him, carrying with it necessarily some great truths with regard to Him, His character, His nature, and His work. And it was in that aspect mainly that the earliest preachers dealt with it. Then, as reflection and the guidance of God's good Spirit led them to understand more and more of the treasure which lay in the fact, it came to be to them, next, a pattern, and a pledge, and a prophecy of their own resurrection. The doctrine of man's immortality and the future life was evolved from it, and was felt to be implied in it. And then it came to be, thirdly and lastly, a symbol or figure of the spiritual resurrection and newness of life into which all they were born who participated in His death. They knew Him first by His Resurrection; they then knew 'the power of His Resurrection' as a pledge of their own; and lastly, they knew it as being the pattern to which they were to be conformed even whilst here on earth.

The words which I have read for my text are the Apostle Peter's own description of what was the office of an Apostle—'to be a witness with us of Christ's Resurrection.' And the statement branches out, I think, into three considerations, to which I ask your attention now. First, we have here the witnesses; secondly, we have

the sufficiency of their testimony; and thirdly, we have the importance of the fact to which they bear their witness. The Apostles are testimony-bearers. Their witness is enough to establish the fact. The fact to which they witness is all-important for the religion and the hopes of the world.

I. First, then, the Witnesses.

Here we have the 'head of the Apostolic College,' the 'primate' of the Twelve, on whose supposed primacy—which is certainly not a 'rock'—such tremendous claims have been built, laying down the qualifications and the functions of an Apostle. How simply they present themselves to his mind! The qualification is only personal knowledge of Jesus Christ in His earthly history, because the function is only to attest His Resurrection. Their work was to bear witness to what they had seen with their eyes; and what was needed, therefore, was nothing more than such familiarity with Christ as should make them competent witnesses to the fact that He died, and to the fact that the same Jesus who had died, and whom they knew so well, rose again and went up to heaven.

The same conception of an Apostle's work lies in Christ's last solemn designation of them for their office, where their whole commission is included in the simple words, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' It appears again and again in the earlier addresses reported in this book. 'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.' 'Whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.' 'With great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection.' 'We are His witnesses of these things.' To Cornelius, Peter speaks of the Apostles as 'witnesses chosen before of God, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the

dead'—and whose charge, received from Christ, was 'to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.' Paul at Antioch speaks of the Twelve, from whom he distinguishes himself, as being 'Christ's witnesses to *the people*'—and seems to regard them as specially commissioned to the Jewish nation, while he was sent to 'declare unto you'—Gentiles—the same 'glad tidings,' in that 'God had raised up Jesus again.' So we might go on accumulating passages, but these will suffice.

I need not spend time in elaborating or emphasising the contrast which the idea of the Apostolic office contained in these simple words presents to the portentous theories of later times. I need only remind you that, according to the Gospels, the work of the Apostles in Christ's lifetime embraced three elements, none of which were peculiar to them—to be with Christ, to preach, and to work miracles; that their characteristic work after His Ascension was this of witness-bearing; that the Church did not owe to them as a body its extension, nor Christian doctrine its form; that whilst Peter and James and John appear in the history, and Matthew perhaps wrote a Gospel, and the other James and Jude are probably the authors of the brief Epistles which bear their names—the rest of the Twelve never appear in the subsequent history. The Acts of the Apostles is a misnomer for Luke's second 'treatise.' It tells the work of Peter alone among the Twelve. The Hellenists Stephen and Philip, the Cypriote Barnabas, and the man of Tarsus—greater than them all—these spread the name of Christ beyond the limits of the Holy City and the chosen people. The solemn power of 'binding and loosing' was not a prerogative of the Twelve, for we read that Jesus came where 'the

disciples were assembled,' and that 'the *disciples* were glad when they saw the Lord'; and 'He breathed on *them*, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted."'

Where in all this is there a trace of the special Apostolic powers which have been alleged to be transmitted from them? Nowhere. Who was it that came and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord hath sent me that thou mightest be filled with the Holy Ghost'? A simple 'layman'! Who was it that stood by, a passive and astonished spectator of the communication of spiritual gifts to Gentile converts, and could only say, 'Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift, as He did unto us, what was I that I could withstand God?' Peter, the leader of the Twelve!

Their task was apparently a humbler, really a far more important one. Their place was apparently a lowlier, really a loftier one. They had to lay broad and deep the basis for all the growth and grace of the Church, in the facts which they witnessed. Their work abides; and when the Celestial City is revealed to our longing hearts, in its foundations will be read 'the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.' Their office was testimony; and their testimony was to this effect — 'Hearken, we eleven men knew this Jesus. Some of us knew Him when He was a boy, and lived beside that little village where He was brought up. We were with Him for three whole years in close contact day and night. We all of us, though we were cowards, stood afar off with a handful of women when He was crucified. We saw Him dead. We saw His grave. We saw Him living, and we touched Him, and handled Him, and He ate and drank with us; and we, sinners that we are that tell it you, we went out with Him to the top of Olivet,

and we saw Him go up into the skies. Do you believe us or do you not? We do not come in the first place to preach doctrines. We are not thinkers or moralists. We are plain men, telling a plain story, to the truth of which we pledge our senses. We do not want compliments about our spiritual elevation, or our pure morality. We do not want reverence as possessors of mysterious and exclusive powers. We want you to believe us as honest men, relating what we have seen. There are eleven of us, and there are five hundred at our back, and we have all got the one simple story to tell. It is, indeed, a gospel, a philosophy, a theology, the reconciliation of earth and heaven, the revelation of God to man, and of man to himself, the unveiling of the future world, the basis of hope; but we bring it to you first as a thing that happened upon this earth of ours, which we saw with our eyes, and of which we are the witnesses.'

To that work there can be no successors. Some of the Apostles were inspired to be the writers of the authoritative fountains of religious truth; but that gift did not belong to them all, and was not the distinctive possession of the Twelve. The power of working miracles, and of communicating supernatural gifts, was not confined to them, but is found exercised by other believers, as well as by a whole 'presbytery.' And as for what was properly their task, and their qualifications, there can be no succession, for there is nothing to succeed to, but what cannot be transmitted—the sight of the risen Saviour, and the witness to His Resurrection as a fact certified by their senses.

II. The sufficiency of the testimony.

Peter regards (as does the whole New Testament, and as did Peter's Master, when He appointed these men)

the witness which he and his fellows bore as enough to lay firm and deep the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The first point that I would suggest here is this: if we think of Christianity as being mainly a set of truths—spiritual, moral, intellectual—then, of course, the way to prove Christianity is to show the consistency of that body of truths with one another, their consistency with other truths, their derivation from admitted principles, their reasonableness, their adaptation to men's nature, the refining and elevating effects of their adoption, and so on. If we think of Christianity, on the other hand, as being first a set of historical facts which carry the doctrines, then the way to prove Christianity is not to show how reasonable it is, not to show how it has been anticipated and expected and desired, not to show how it corresponds with men's needs and men's longings, not to show what large and blessed results follow from its acceptance. All these are legitimate ways of establishing principles; but the way to establish a fact is only one—that is, to find somebody that can say, 'I know it, for I saw it.'

And my belief is that the course of modern 'apologetics,' as they are called—methods of defending Christianity—has followed too slavishly the devious course of modern antagonism, and has departed from its real stronghold when it has consented to argue the question on these (as I take them to be) lower and less sufficing grounds. I am thankful to adopt all that wise Christian apologists may have said in regard to the reasonableness of Christianity; its correspondence with men's wants, the blessings that follow from it, and so forth; but the Gospel is first and foremost a history, and you cannot prove that a thing has happened

by showing how very desirable it is that it should happen, how reasonable it is to expect that it should happen, what good results would follow from believing that it has happened—all that is irrelevant. Think of it as first a history, and then you are shut up to the old-fashioned line of evidence, irrefragable as I take it to be, to which all these others may afterwards be appended as confirmatory. It is true, because sufficient eye-witnesses assert it. It did happen, because it is commended to us by the ordinary canons of evidence which we accept in regard to all other matters of fact.

With regard to the sufficiency of the specific evidence here, I wish to make only one or two observations.

Suppose you yield up everything that the most craving and unreasonable modern scepticism can demand as to the date and authorship of these tracts that make the New Testament, we have still left four letters of the Apostle Paul, which no one has ever denied, which the very extremest professors of the 'higher criticism' themselves accept. These four are the Epistles to the Romans, the first and second to the Corinthians, and that to the Galatians. The dates which are assigned to these four letters by any one, believer or unbeliever, bring them within five-and-twenty years of the alleged date of Christ's resurrection.

Then what do we find in these undeniably and admittedly genuine letters, written a quarter of a century after the supposed fact? We find in all of them reference to it—the distinct allegation of it. We find in one of them that the Apostle states it as being the substance of his preaching and of his brethren's preaching, that 'Christ died and rose again according to the Scriptures,' and that He was seen by individuals, by multitudes, by a whole five hundred, the greater portion of whom

were living and available as witnesses when he wrote.

And we find that side by side with this statement, there is the reference to his own vision of the risen Saviour, which carries us up within ten years of the alleged fact. So, then, by the evidence of admittedly genuine documents, which are dealing with a state of things ten years after the supposed resurrection, there was a unanimous concurrence of belief on the part of the whole primitive Church, so that even the heretics who said that there was no resurrection of the dead could be argued with on the ground of their belief in Christ's Resurrection. The whole Church with one voice asserted it. And there were hundreds of living men ready to attest it. It was not a handful of women who fancied they had seen Him once, very early in the dim twilight of a spring morning—but it was half a thousand that had beheld Him. He had been seen by them not once, but often; not far off, but close at hand; not in one place, but in Galilee and Jerusalem; not under one set of circumstances, but at all hours of the day, abroad and in the house, walking and sitting, speaking and eating, by them singly and in numbers. He had not been seen only by excited expectants of His appearance, but by incredulous eyes and surprised hearts, who doubted ere they worshipped, and paused before they said, 'My Lord and my God!' They neither hoped that He would rise, nor believed that He had risen; and the world may be thankful that they were 'slow of heart to believe.'

Would not the testimony which can be alleged for Christ's Resurrection be enough to guarantee any event but this? And if so, why is it not enough to guarantee this too? If, as nobody denies, the Early Church,

within ten years of Christ's Resurrection, believed in His Resurrection, and were ready to go, and did, many of them, go to the death in assertion of their veracity in declaring it, then one of two things—Either they were right or they were wrong; and if the latter, one of two things—If the Resurrection be not a fact, then that belief was either a delusion or a deceit.

It was not a delusion, for such an illusion is altogether unexampled; and it is absurd to think of it as being shared by a multitude like the Early Church. Nations have said, 'Our King is not dead—he is gone away and he will come back.' Loving disciples have said, 'Our Teacher lives in solitude and will return to us.' But this is no parallel to these. This is not a fond imagination giving an apparent substance to its own creation, but sense recognising first the fact, 'He *is* dead,' and then, in opposition to expectation, and when hope had sickened to despair, recognising the astounding fact, 'He liveth that was dead'; and to suppose that that should have been the rooted conviction of hundreds of men who were not idiots, finds no parallel in the history of human illusions, and no analogy in such legends as those to which I have referred.

It was not a myth, for a myth does not grow in ten years. And there was no motive to frame one, if Christ was dead and all was over. It was not a deceit, for the character of the men, and the character of the associated morality, and the obvious absence of all self-interest, and the persecutions and sorrows which they endured, make it inconceivable that the fairest building that ever hath been reared in the world, and which is cemented by men's blood, should be built upon the mud and slime of a conscious deceit!

And all this we are asked to put aside at the bidding

of a glaring begging of the whole question, and an outrageous assertion which no man that believes in a God at all can logically maintain, viz. that no testimony can reach to the miraculous, or that miracles are impossible.

No testimony reach to the miraculous! Well, put it into a concrete form. Can testimony not reach to this: 'I know, because I saw, that a man was dead; I know, because I saw, a dead man live again'? If testimony can do that, I think we may safely leave the verbal sophism that it cannot reach to the miraculous to take care of itself.

And, then, with regard to the other assumption—miracle is impossible. That is an illogical begging of the whole question in dispute. It cannot avail to brush aside testimony. You cannot smother facts by theories in that fashion. Again, one would like to know how it comes that our modern men of science, who protest so much against science being corrupted by metaphysics, should commit themselves to an assertion like that? Surely that is stark, staring metaphysics. It seems as if they thought that the 'metaphysics' which said that there was anything behind the physical universe was unscientific; but that the metaphysics which said that there was nothing behind physics was quite legitimate, and ought to be allowed to pass muster. What have the votaries of pure physical science, who hold the barren word-contests of theology and the proud pretensions of philosophy in such contempt, to do out-Heroding Herod in that fashion, and venturing on metaphysical assertions of such a sort? Let them keep to their own line, and tell us all that crucibles and scalpels can reveal, and we will listen as becomes us. But when they contradict their own principles in order

to deny the possibility of miracle, we need only give them back their own words, and ask that the investigation of facts shall not be hampered and clogged with metaphysical prejudices. No! no! Christ made no mistake when He built His Church upon that rock—the historical evidence of a resurrection from the dead, though all the wise men of Areopagus hill may make its cliffs ring with mocking laughter when we say, upon Easter morning, ‘The Lord is risen indeed!’

III. There is a final consideration connected with these words, which I must deal with very briefly—the importance of the fact which is thus borne witness to.

I have already pointed out that the Resurrection of Christ is viewed in Scripture in three aspects: in its bearing upon His nature and work, as a pattern for our future, and as a symbol of our present newness of life. The importance to which I refer now applies only to that first aspect.

With the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands or falls the Divinity of Christ. As Paul said, in that letter to which I have referred, ‘Declared to be the Son of God, with power by the resurrection from the dead.’ As Peter said in the sermon that follows this one of our text, ‘God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ As Paul said, on Mars Hill, ‘He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.’

The case is this. Jesus lived as we know, and in the course of that life claimed to be the Son of God. He made such broad and strange assertions as these—‘I and My Father are One.’ ‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.’ ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life.’

‘He that believeth on Me shall never die.’ ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things, and the third day He shall rise again.’ Thus speaking He dies, and rises again and passes into the heavens. That is the last mightiest utterance of the same testimony, which spake from heaven at His baptism, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!’ If He be risen from the dead, then His loftiest claims are confirmed from the throne, and we can see in Him, the Son of God. But if death holds Him still, and ‘the Syrian stars look down upon His grave,’ as a modern poet tells us in his dainty English that they do, then what becomes of these words of His, and of our estimate of the character of Him, the speaker? Let us hear no more about the pure morality of Jesus Christ, and the beauty of His calm and lofty teaching, and the rest of it. Take away His resurrection from the dead, and we have left beautiful precepts, and fair wisdom, deformed with a monstrous self-assertion and the constant reiteration of claims which the event proves to have been baseless. Either He has risen from the dead or His words were blasphemy. Men nowadays talk very lightly of throwing aside the supernatural portions of the Gospel history, and retaining reverence for the great Teacher, the pure moralist of Nazareth. The Pharisees put the issue more coarsely and truly when they said, ‘That deceiver said, while He was yet alive, after three days I will rise again.’ Yes! one or the other. ‘Declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,’ or—that which our lips refuse to say even as a hypothesis!

Still further, with the Resurrection stands or falls Christ’s whole work for our redemption. If He died, like other men—if that awful bony hand has got its

grip upon Him too, then we have no proof that the cross was anything but a martyr's cross. His Resurrection is the proof of His completed work of redemption. It is the proof—followed as it is by His Ascension—that His death was not the tribute which for Himself He had to pay, but the ransom for us. His Resurrection is the condition of His present activity. If He has not risen, He has not put away sin; and if He has not put it away by the sacrifice of Himself, none has, and it remains. We come back to the old dreary alternative: 'if Christ be not risen, your faith is vain, and our preaching is vain. Ye are yet in your sins, and they which have fallen asleep in Christ' with unfulfilled hopes fixed upon a baseless vision—they of whom we hoped, through our tears, that they live with Him—they 'are perished.' For, if He be not risen, there is no resurrection; and, if He be not risen, there is no forgiveness; and, if He be not risen, there is no Son of God; and the world is desolate, and the heaven is empty, and the grave is dark, and sin abides, and death is eternal. If Christ be dead, then that awful vision is true, 'As I looked up into the immeasurable heavens for the Divine Eye, it froze me with an empty, bottomless eye-socket.'

There is nothing between us and darkness, despair, death, but that ancient message, 'I declare unto you the Gospel which I preach, by which ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised the third day according to the Scriptures.'

Well, then, may we take up the ancient glad salutation, 'The Lord is risen!' and, turning from these thoughts of the disaster and despair that that awful

supposition drags after it, fall back upon sober certainty, and with the Apostle break forth in triumph, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'!

THE ABIDING GIFT AND ITS TRANSITORY ACCOMPANIMENTS

'And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? 8. And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10. Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11. Cretes, and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13. Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.'—Acts ii. 1-13.

ONLY ten days elapsed between the Ascension and Pentecost. The attitude of the Church during that time should be carefully noted. They obeyed implicitly Christ's command to wait for the 'power from on high.' The only act recorded is the election of Matthias to fill Judas's place, and it is at least questionable whether that was not a mistake, and shown to be such by Christ's subsequent choice of Paul as an Apostle. But, with the exception of that one flash of doubtful activity, prayer, supplication, patient waiting, and clinging together in harmonious expectancy, characterised the hundred and twenty brethren.

They must have been wrought to an intense pitch of anticipation, for they knew that their waiting was to

be short, and they knew, at least partially, what they were to receive, namely, 'power from on high,' or 'the promise of the Father.' Probably, too, the great Feast, so near at hand, would appear to them a likely time for the fulfilment of the promise.

So, very early on that day of Pentecost, they betook themselves to their usual place of assembling, probably the 'large upper room,' already hallowed to their memories; and in each heart the eager question would spring, 'Will it be to-day?' It is as true now as it was then, that the spirits into whom the Holy Spirit breathes His power must keep themselves still, expectant, prayerful. Perpetual occupation may be more loss of time than devout waiting, with hands folded, because the heart is wide open to receive the power which will fit the hands for better work.

It was but 'the third hour of the day' when Peter stood up to speak; it must have been little after dawn when the brethren came together. How long they had been assembled we do not know, but we cannot doubt how they had been occupied. Many a prayer had gone up through the morning air, and, no doubt, some voice was breathing the united desires, when a deep, strange sound was heard at a distance, and rapidly gained volume, and was heard to draw near. Like the roaring of a tempest hurrying towards them, it hushed human voices, and each man would feel, 'Surely now the Gift comes!' Nearer and nearer it approached, and at last burst into the chamber where they sat silent and unmoving.

But if we look carefully at Luke's words, we see that what filled the house was not agitated air, or wind, but 'a sound as of wind.' The language implies that there was no rush of atmosphere that lifted a hair on any

cheek, or blew on any face, but only such a sound as is made by tempest. It suggested wind, but it was not wind. By that first symbolic preparation for the communication of the promised gift, the old symbolism which lies in the very word 'Spirit,' and had been brought anew to the disciples' remembrance by Christ's words to Nicodemus, and by His breathing on them when He gave them an anticipatory and partial bestowment of the Spirit, is brought to view, with its associations of life-giving power and liberty. 'Thou hearest the sound thereof,' could scarcely fail to be remembered by some in that chamber.

But it is not to be supposed that the audible symbol continued when the second preparatory one, addressed to the eye, appeared. As the former had been not wind, but like it, the latter was not fire, but 'as of fire.' The language does not answer the question whether what was seen was a mass from which the tongues detached themselves, or whether only the separate tongues were visible as they moved overhead. But the final result was that 'it sat on each.' The verb has no expressed subject, and 'fire' cannot be the subject, for it is only introduced as a comparison. Probably, therefore, we are to understand 'a tongue' as the unexpressed subject of the verb.

Clearly, the point of the symbol is the same as that presented in the Baptist's promise of a baptism 'with the Holy Ghost and fire.' The Spirit was to be in them as a Spirit of burning, thawing natural coldness and melting hearts with a genial warmth, which should beget flaming enthusiasm, fervent love, burning zeal, and should work transformation into its own fiery substance. The rejoicing power, the quick energy, the consuming force, the assimilating action of fire, are all

included in the symbol, and should all be possessed by Christ's disciples.

But were the tongue-like shapes of the flames significant too? It is doubtful, for, natural as is the supposition that they were, it is to be remembered that 'tongues of fire' is a usual expression, and may mean nothing more than the flickering shoots of flame into which a fire necessarily parts.

But these two symbols are only symbols. The true fulfilment of the great promise follows. Mark the brief simplicity of the quiet words in which the greatest bestowment ever made on humanity, the beginning of an altogether new era, the equipment of the Church for her age-long conflict, is told. There was an actual impartation to men of a divine life, to dwell in them and actuate them; to bring all good to victory in them; to illuminate, sustain, direct, and elevate; to cleanse and quicken. The gift was complete. They were 'filled.' No doubt they had much more to receive, and they received it, as their natures became, by faithful obedience to the indwelling Spirit, capable of more. But up to the measure of their then capacities they were filled; and, since their spirits were expansible, and the gift was infinite, they were in a position to grow steadily in possession of it, till they were 'filled with all the fulness of God.'

Further, 'they were *all* filled,'—not the Apostles only, but the whole hundred and twenty. Peter's quotation from Joel distinctly implies the universality of the gift, which the 'servants and handmaidens,' the brethren and the women, now received. Herein is the true democracy of Christianity. There are still diversities of operations and degrees of possession, but all Christians have the Spirit. All 'they that believe on Him,'

and only they, have received it. Of old the light shone only on the highest peaks,—prophets, and kings, and psalmists; now the lowest depths of the valleys are flooded with it. Would that Christians generally believed more fully in, and set more store by, that great gift!

As symbols preceded, tokens followed. The essential fact of Pentecost is neither the sound and fire, nor the speaking with other tongues, but the communication of the Holy Spirit. The sign and result of that was the gift of utterance in various languages, not their own, nor learned by ordinary ways. No twisting of the narrative can weaken the plain meaning of it, that these unlearned Galileans spake in tongues which their users recognised to be their own. The significance of the fact will appear presently, but first note the attestation of it by the multitude.

Of course, the foreign-born Jews, who, from motives of piety, however mistaken, had come to dwell in Jerusalem, are said to have been 'from every nation under heaven,' by an obvious and ordinary license. It is enough that, as the subsequent catalogue shows, they came from all corners of the then known world, though the extremes of territory mentioned cover but a small space on a terrestrial globe.

The 'sound' of the rushing wind had been heard hurtling through the city in the early morning hours, and had served as guide to the spot. A curious crowd came hurrying to ascertain what this noise of tempest in a calm meant, and they were met by something more extraordinary still. Try to imagine the spectacle. As would appear from verse 33, the tongues of fire remained lambently glowing on each head ('which ye see'), and the whole hundred and twenty, thus

strangely crowned, were pouring out rapturous praises, each in some strange tongue. When the astonished ears had become accustomed to the apparent tumult, every man in the crowd heard some one or more speaking in his own tongue, language, or dialect, and all were declaring the mighty works of God; that is, probably, the story of the crucified, ascended Jesus.

We need not dwell on subordinate questions, as to the number of languages represented there, or as to the catalogue in verses 9 and 10. But we would emphasise two thoughts. First, the natural result of being filled with God's Spirit is utterance of the great truths of Christ's Gospel. As surely as light radiates, as surely as any deep emotion demands expression, so certainly will a soul filled with the Spirit be forced to break into speech. If professing Christians have never known the impulse to tell of the Christ whom they have found, their religion must be very shallow and imperfect. If their spirits are full, they will overflow in speech.

Second, Pentecost is a prophecy of the universal proclamation of the Gospel, and of the universal praise which shall one day rise to Him that was slain. 'This company of brethren praising God in the tongues of the whole world represented the whole world which shall one day praise God in its various tongues' (Bengel). Pentecost reversed Babel, not by bringing about a featureless monopoly, but by consecrating diversity, and showing that each language could be hallowed, and that each lent some new strain of music to the chorus.

It prophesied of the time when 'men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation' should lift up their voices to Him who has purchased them unto God with

His blood. It began a communication of the Spirit to all believers which is never to cease while the world stands. The mighty rushing sound has died into silence, the fiery tongues rest on no heads now, the miraculous results of the gifts of the Spirit have passed away also, but the gift remains, and the Spirit of God abides for ever with the Church of Christ.

THE FOURFOLD SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

'A rushing mighty wind.' . . . 'Cloven tongues like as of fire.' . . . 'I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh.'—ACTS II. 2, 3, 17.

'Ye have an unction from the Holy One.'—1 JOHN II. 20.

WIND, fire, water, oil,—these four are constant Scriptural symbols for the Spirit of God. We have them all in these fragments of verses which I have taken for my text now, and which I have isolated from their context for the purpose of bringing out simply these symbolical references. I think that perhaps we may get some force and freshness to the thoughts proper to this day¹ by looking at these rather than by treating the subject in some more abstract form. We have then the Breath of the Spirit, the Fire of the Spirit, the Water of the Spirit, and the Anointing Oil of the Spirit. And the consideration of these four will bring out a great many of the principal Scriptural ideas about the gift of the Spirit of God which belongs to all Christian souls.

I. First, 'a rushing mighty wind.'

Of course, the symbol is but the putting into picturesque form of the idea that lies in the name. 'Spirit' is 'breath.' Wind is but air in motion. Breath is the

¹ Whit Sunday.

synonym for life. 'Spirit' and 'life' are two words for one thing. So then, in the symbol, the 'rushing mighty wind,' we have set forth the highest work of the Spirit—the communication of a new and supernatural life.

We are carried back to that grand vision of the prophet who saw the bones lying, very many and very dry, sapless and disintegrated, a heap dead and ready to rot. The question comes to him: 'Son of man! Can these bones live?' The only possible answer, if he consult experience, is, 'O Lord God! Thou knowest.' Then follows the great invocation: 'Come from the four winds, O Breath! and breathe upon these slain that they may live.' And the Breath comes and 'they stand up, an exceeding great army.' 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' The Scripture treats us all as dead, being separated from God, unless we are united to Him by faith in Jesus Christ. According to the saying of the Evangelist, 'They which believe on Him receive' the Spirit, and thereby receive the life which He gives, or, as our Lord Himself speaks, are 'born of the Spirit.' The highest and most characteristic office of the Spirit of God is to enkindle this new life, and hence His noblest name, among the many by which He is called, is the Spirit of life.

Again, remember, 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' If there be life given it must be kindred with the life which is its source. Reflect upon those profound words of our Lord: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.' They describe first the operation of the life-giving Spirit, but they describe also the characteristics of the resulting life.

'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' That spiritual

life, both in the divine source and in the human recipient, is its own law. Of course the wind has its laws, as every physical agent has; but these are so complicated and undiscovered that it has always been the very symbol of freedom, and poets have spoken of these 'chartered libertines,' the winds, and 'free as the air' has become a proverb. So that Divine Spirit is limited by no human conditions or laws, but dispenses His gifts in superb disregard of conventionalities and externalisms. Just as the lower gift of what we call 'genius' is above all limits of culture or education or position, and falls on a wool-stapler in Stratford-on-Avon, or on a ploughman in Ayrshire, so, in a similar manner, the altogether different gift of the divine, life-giving Spirit follows no lines that Churches or institutions draw. It falls upon an Augustinian monk in a convent, and he shakes Europe. It falls upon a tinker in Bedford gaol, and he writes *Pilgrim's Progress*. It falls upon a cobbler in Kettering, and he founds modern Christian missions. It blows 'where it listeth,' sovereignly indifferent to the expectations and limitations and the externalisms, even of organised Christianity, and touching this man and that man, not arbitrarily but according to 'the good pleasure' that is a law to itself, because it is perfect in wisdom and in goodness.

And as thus the life-giving Spirit imparts Himself according to higher laws than we can grasp, so in like manner the life that is derived from it is a life which is its own law. The Christian conscience, touched by the Spirit of God, owes allegiance to no regulations or external commandments laid down by man. The Christian conscience, enlightened by the Spirit of God, at its peril will take its beliefs from any other than

from that Divine Spirit. All authority over conduct, all authority over belief is burnt up and disappears in the presence of the grand democracy of the true Christian principle: 'Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ'; and every one of you possesses the Spirit which teaches, the Spirit which inspires, the Spirit which enlightens, the Spirit which is the guide to all truth. So 'the wind bloweth where it listeth,' and the voice of that Divine Quickener is,

'Myself shall to My darling be
Both law and impulse.'

Under the impulse derived from the Divine Spirit, the human spirit 'listeth' what is right, and is bound to follow the promptings of its highest desires. Those men only are free as the air we breathe, who are vitalised by the Spirit of the Lord, for 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there,' and there alone, 'is liberty.'

In this symbol there lies not only the thought of a life derived, kindred with the life bestowed, and free like the life which is given, but there lies also the idea of power. The wind which filled the house was not only mighty but 'borne onward'—fitting type of the strong impulse by which in olden times 'holy men spake as they were "borne onward"' (the word is the same) 'by the Holy Ghost.' There are diversities of operations, but it is the same breath of God, which sometimes blows in the softest *pianissimo* that scarcely rustles the summer woods in the leafy month of June, and sometimes storms in wild tempest that dashes the seas against the rocks. So this mighty life-giving Agent moves in gentleness and yet in power, and sometimes swells and rises almost to tempest, but is ever the impelling force of all that is strong and true and fair in Christian hearts and lives.

The history of the world, since that day of Pentecost, has been a commentary upon the words of my text. With viewless, impalpable energy, the mighty breath of God swept across the ancient world and 'laid the lofty city' of paganism 'low; even to the ground, and brought it even to the dust.' A breath passed over the whole civilised world, like the breath of the west wind upon the glaciers in the spring, melting the thick-ribbed ice, and wooing forth the flowers, and the world was made over again. In our own hearts and lives this is the one Power that will make us strong and good. The question is all-important for each of us, 'Have I this life, and does it move me, as the ships are borne along by the wind?' 'As many as are impelled by the Spirit of God, they'—*they*—'are the sons of God.' Is that the breath that swells all the sails of your lives, and drives you upon your course? If it be, you are Christians; if it be not, you are not.

II. And now a word as to the second of these symbols—'Cloven tongues as of fire'—the fire of the Spirit.

I need not do more than remind you how frequently that emblem is employed both in the Old and in the New Testament. John the Baptist contrasted the cold negative efficiency of his baptism, which, at its best, was but a baptism of repentance, with the quickening power of the baptism of Him who was to follow him; when he said, 'I indeed baptise you with water, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' The two words mean but one thing, the fire being the emblem of the Spirit.

You will remember, too, how our Lord Himself employs the same metaphor when He speaks about His

coming to bring fire on the earth, and His longing to see it kindled into a beneficent blaze. In this connection the fire is a symbol of a quick, triumphant energy, which will transform us into its own likeness. There are two sides to that emblem: one destructive, one creative; one wrathful, one loving. There are the fire of love, and the fire of anger. There is the fire of the sunshine which is the condition of life, as well as the fire of the lightning which burns and consumes. The emblem of fire is selected to express the work of the Spirit of God, by reason of its leaping, triumphant, transforming energy. See, for instance, how, when you kindle a pile of dead green-wood, the tongues of fire spring from point to point until they have conquered the whole mass, and turned it all into a ruddy likeness of the parent flame. And so here, this fire of God, if it fall upon you, will burn up all your coldness, and will make you glow with enthusiasm, working your intellectual convictions in fire not in frost, making your creed a living power in your lives, and kindling you into a flame of earnest consecration.

The same idea is expressed by the common phrases of every language. We speak of the fervour of love, the warmth of affection, the blaze of enthusiasm, the fire of emotion, the coldness of indifference. Christians are to be set on fire of God. If the Spirit dwell in us, He will make us fiery like Himself, even as fire turns the wettest green-wood into fire. We have more than enough of cold Christians who are afraid of nothing so much as of being betrayed into warm emotion.

I believe, dear brethren, and I am bound to express the belief, that one of the chief wants of the Christian Church of this generation, the Christian Church of this

city, the Christian Church of this chapel, is more of the fire of God! We are all icebergs compared with what we ought to be. Look at yourselves; never mind about your brethren. Let each of us look at his own heart, and say whether there is any trace in his Christianity of the power of that Spirit who is fire. Is our religion flame or ice? Where among us are to be found lives blazing with enthusiastic devotion and earnest love? Do not such words sound like mockery when applied to us? Have we not to listen to that solemn old warning that never loses its power, and, alas! seems never to lose its appropriateness: 'Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.' We ought to be like the burning beings before God's throne, the seraphim, the spirits that blaze and serve. We ought to be like God Himself, all aflame with love. Let us seek penitently for that Spirit of fire who will dwell in us all if we will.

The metaphor of fire suggests also—purifying. 'The Spirit of burning' will burn the filth out of us. That is the only way by which a man can ever be made clean. You may wash and wash and wash with the cold water of moral reformation, you will never get the dirt out with it. No washing and no rubbing will ever cleanse sin. The way to purge a soul is to do with it as they do with foul clay—thrust it into the fire and that will burn all the blackness out of it. Get the love of God into your hearts, and the fire of His Divine Spirit into your spirits to melt you down, as it were, and then the scum and the dross will come to the top, and you can skim them off. Two powers conquer my sin: the one is the blood of Jesus Christ, which washes me from all the guilt of the past; the other is the fiery influence of that Divine Spirit which

makes me pure and clean for all the time to come. Pray to be kindled with the fire of God.

III. Then once more, take that other metaphor, 'I will pour out of My Spirit.'

That implies an emblem which is very frequently used, both in the Old and in the New Testament, viz., the Spirit as water. As our Lord said to Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' The 'water' stands in the same relation to the 'Spirit' as the 'fire' does in the saying of John the Baptist already referred to—that is to say, it is simply a symbol or material emblem of the Spirit. I suppose nobody would say that there were two baptisms spoken of by John, one of the Holy Ghost and one of fire,—and I suppose that just in the same way, there are not two agents of regeneration pointed at in our Lord's words, nor even two conditions, but that the Spirit is the sole agent, and 'water' is but a figure to express some aspect of His operations. So that there is no reference to the water of baptism in the words, and to see such a reference is to be led astray by sound, and out of a metaphor to manufacture a miracle.

There are other passages where, in like manner, the Spirit is compared to a flowing stream, such as, for instance, when our Lord said, 'He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,' and when John saw a 'river of water of life proceeding from the throne.' The expressions, too, of 'pouring out' and 'shedding forth' the Spirit, point in the same direction, and are drawn from more than one passage of Old Testament prophecy. What, then, is the significance of comparing that Divine Spirit with a

river of water? First, cleansing, of which I need not say any more, because I have dealt with it in the previous part of my sermon. Then, further, refreshing, and satisfying. Ah! dear brethren, there is only one thing that will slake the immortal thirst in your souls. The world will never do it; love or ambition gratified and wealth possessed, will never do it. You will be as thirsty after you have drunk of these streams as ever you were before. There is one spring 'of which if a man drink, he shall never thirst' with unsatisfied, painful longings, but shall never cease to thirst with the longing which is blessedness, because it is fruition. Our thirst can be slaked by the deep draught of 'the river of the Water of Life, which proceeds from the Throne of God and the Lamb.' The Spirit of God, drunk in by my spirit, will still and satisfy my whole nature, and with it I shall be glad. Drink of this. 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!'

The Spirit is not only refreshing and satisfying, but also productive and fertilising. In Eastern lands a rill of water is all that is needed to make the wilderness rejoice. Turn that stream on to the barrenness of your hearts, and fair flowers will grow that would never grow without it. The one means of lofty and fruitful Christian living is a deep, inward possession of the Spirit of God. The one way to fertilise barren souls is to let that stream flood them all over, and then the flush of green will soon come, and that which is else a desert will 'rejoice and blossom as the rose.'

So this water will cleanse, it will satisfy and refresh, it will be productive and will fertilise, and 'everything shall live whithersoever that river cometh.'

IV. Then, lastly, we have the oil of the Spirit.

‘Ye have an unction,’ says St. John in our last text, ‘from the Holy One.’ I need not remind you, I suppose, of how in the old system, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with consecrating oil, as a symbol of their calling, and of their fitness for their special offices. The reason for the use of such a symbol, I presume, would lie in the invigorating and in the supposed, and possibly real, health-giving effect of the use of oil in those climates. Whatever may have been the reason for the use of oil in official anointings, the meaning of the act was plain. It was a preparation for a specific and distinct service. And so, when we read of the oil of the Spirit, we are to think that it is that which fits us for being prophets, priests, and kings, and which calls us to, because it fits us for, these functions.

You are anointed to be prophets that you may make known Him who has loved and saved you, and may go about the world evidently inspired to show forth His praise, and make His name glorious. That anointing calls and fits you to be priests, mediators between God and man, bringing God to men, and by pleading and persuasion, and the presentation of the truth, drawing men to God. That unction calls and fits you to be kings, exercising authority over the little monarchy of your own natures, and over the men round you, who will bow in submission whenever they come in contact with a man all evidently aflame with the love of Jesus Christ, and filled with His Spirit. The world is hard and rude; the world is blind and stupid; the world often fails to know its best friends and its truest benefactors; but there is no crust of stupidity so crass and dense but that through it there will pass the penetrating shafts of light that ray from the face of

a man who walks in fellowship with Jesus. The whole nation of old was honoured with these sacred names. They were a kingdom of priests; and the divine Voice said of the nation, 'Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm!' How much more are all Christian men, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, made prophets, priests, and kings to God! Alas for the difference between what they ought to be and what they are!

And then, do not forget also that when the Scriptures speak of Christian men as being anointed, it really speaks of them as being Messiahs. 'Christ' means *anointed*, does it not? 'Messiah' means *anointed*. And when we read in such a passage as that of my text, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One,' we cannot but feel that the words point in the same direction as the great words of our Master Himself, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.' By authority derived, no doubt, and in a subordinate and secondary sense, of course, we are Messiahs, anointed with that Spirit which was given to Him, not by measure, and which has passed from Him to us. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.'

So, dear brethren, all these things being certainly so, what are we to say about the present state of Christendom? What are we to say about the present state of English Christianity, Church and Dissent alike? Is Pentecost a vanished glory, then? Has that 'rushing mighty wind' blown itself out, and a dead calm followed? Has that leaping fire died down into grey ashes? Has the great river that burst out then, like the stream from the foot of the glaciers of Mont Blanc, full-grown in its birth, been all swallowed

up in the sand, like some of those rivers in the East? Has the oil dried in the cruse? People tell us that Christianity is on its death-bed; and the aspect of a great many professing Christians seems to confirm the statement. But let us thankfully recognise that 'we are not straitened in God, but in ourselves.' To how many of us the question might be put: 'Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?' And how many of us by our lives answer: 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' Let us go where we can receive Him; and remember the blessed words: 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him'!

PETER'S FIRST SERMON

'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. 34. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, 35. Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool. 36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. 37. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.'—Acts ii. 32-47.

THIS passage may best be dealt with as divided into three parts: the sharp spear-thrust of Peter's closing

words (vs. 32-36), the wounded and healed hearers (vs. 37-41), and the fair morning dawn of the Church (vs. 42-47).

I. Peter's address begins with pointing out the fulfilment of prophecy in the gift of the Spirit (vs. 14-21). It then declares the Resurrection of Jesus as foretold by prophecy, and witnessed to by the whole body of believers (vs. 22-32), and it ends by bringing together these two facts, the gift of the Spirit and the Resurrection and Ascension, as effect and cause, and as establishing beyond all doubt that Jesus is the Christ of prophecy, and the Lord on whom Joel had declared that whoever called should be saved. We now begin with the last verse of the second part of the address.

Observe the significant alternation of the names of 'Christ' and 'Jesus' in verses 31 and 32. The former verse establishes that prophecy had foretold the Resurrection of the Messiah, whoever he might be; the latter asserts that 'this Jesus' has fulfilled the prophetic conditions. That is not a thing to be argued about, but to be attested by competent witnesses. It was presented to the multitude on Pentecost, as it is to us, as a plain matter of fact, on which the whole fabric of Christianity is built, and which itself securely rests on the concordant testimony of those who knew Him alive, saw Him dead, and were familiar with Him risen.

There is a noble ring of certitude in Peter's affirmation, and of confidence that the testimony producible was overwhelming. Unless Jesus had risen, there would neither have been a Pentecost nor a Church to receive the gift. The simple fact which Peter alleged in that first sermon, 'whereof we all are witnesses,' is still too strong for the deniers of the Resurrection, as their many devices to get over it prove.

But, a listener might ask, what has this witness of yours to do with Joel's prophecy, or with this speaking with tongues? The answer follows in the last part of the sermon. The risen Jesus has ascended up; that is inseparable from the fact of resurrection, and is part of our testimony. He is 'exalted by,' or, perhaps, at, 'the right hand of God.' And that exaltation is to us the token that there He has received from the Father the Spirit, whom He promised to send when He left us. Therefore it is He—'this Jesus'—who has 'poured forth this,'—this new strange gift, the tokens of which you see flaming on each head, and hear bursting in praise from every tongue.

What triumphant emphasis is in that 'He'! Peter quotes Joel's word 'pour forth.' The prophet had said, as the mouthpiece of God, '*I will pour forth*'; Peter unhesitatingly transfers the word to Jesus. We must not assume in him at this stage a fully-developed consciousness of our Lord's divine nature, but neither must we blink the tremendous assumption which he feels warranted in making, that the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God meant His exercising the power which belonged to God Himself.

In verse 34, he stays for a moment to establish by prophecy that the Ascension, of which he had for the first time spoken in verse 33, is part of the prophetic characteristics of the Messiah. His demonstration runs parallel with his preceding one as to the Resurrection. He quotes Psalm cx., which he had learned to do from his Master, and just as he had argued about the prediction of Resurrection, that the dead Psalmist's words could not apply to himself, and must therefore apply to the Messiah; so he concludes that it was not 'David' who was called by Jehovah to sit as 'Lord' on His right hand.

If not David, it could only be the Messiah who was thus invested with Lordship, and exalted as participator of the throne of the Most High.

Then comes the final thrust of the spear, for which all the discourse has been preparing. The Apostle rises to the full height of his great commission, and sets the trumpet to his mouth, summoning 'all the house of Israel,' priests, rulers, and all the people, to acknowledge his Master. He proclaims his supreme dignity and Messiahship. He is the 'Lord' of whom the Psalmist sang, and the prophet declared that whoever called on His name should be saved; and He is the Christ for whom Israel looked.

Last of all, he sets in sharp contrast what God had done with Jesus, and what Israel had done, and the barb of his arrow lies in the last words, 'whom ye crucified.' And this bold champion of Jesus, this undaunted arraigner of a nation's crimes, was the man who, a few weeks before, had quailed before a maid-servant's saucy tongue! What made the change? Will anything but the Resurrection and Pentecost account for the psychological transformation effected in him and the other Apostles?

II. No wonder that 'they were pricked in their heart'! Such a thrust must have gone deep, even where the armour of prejudice was thick. The scene they had witnessed, and the fiery words of explanation, taken together, produced incipient conviction, and the conviction produced alarm. How surely does the first glimpse of Jesus as Christ and Lord set conscience to work! The question, 'What shall we do?' is the beginning of conversion. The acknowledgment of Jesus which does not lead to it is shallow and worthless. The most orthodox acceptor, so far as intellect goes, of the gospel, who has

not been driven by it to ask his own duty in regard to it, and what he is to do to receive its benefits, and to escape from his sins, has not accepted it at all.

Peter's answer lays down two conditions: repentance and baptism. The former is often taken in too narrow a sense as meaning sorrow for sin, whereas it means a change of disposition or mind, which will be accompanied, no doubt, with 'godly sorrow,' but is in itself deeper than sorrow, and is the turning away of heart and will from past love and practice of evil. The second, baptism, is 'in the name of Jesus Christ,' or more accurately, '*upon* the name,'—that is, on the ground of the revealed character of Jesus. That necessarily implies faith in that Name; for, without such faith, the baptism would not be on the ground of the Name. The two things are regarded as inseparable, being the inside and the outside of the Christian discipleship. Repentance, faith, baptism, these three, are called for by Peter.

But 'remission of sins' is not attached to the immediately preceding clause, so as that baptism is said to secure remission, but to the whole of what goes before in the sentence. Obedience to the requirements would bring the same gift to the obedient as the disciples had received; for it would make them disciples also. But, while repentance and baptism which presupposed faith were the normal, precedent conditions of the Spirit's bestowal, the case of Cornelius, where the Spirit was given before baptism, forbids the attempt to link the rite and the divine gift more closely together.

The Apostle was eager to share the gift. The more we have of the Spirit, the more shall we desire that others may have Him, and the more sure shall we be that He is meant for all. So Peter went on to base his assurance,

that his hearers might all possess the Spirit, on the universal destination of the promise. Joel had said, 'on all flesh'; Peter declares that word to point downwards through all generations, and outwards to all nations. How swiftly had he grown in grasp of the sweep of Christ's work! How far beneath that moment of illumination some of his subsequent actions fell!

We have only a summary of his exhortations, the gist of which was earnest warning to separate from the fate of the nation by separating in will and mind from its sins. Swift conviction followed the Spirit-given words, as it ever will do when the speaker is filled with the Holy Spirit, and has therefore a tongue of fire. Three thousand new disciples were made that day, and though there must have been many superficial adherents, and none with much knowledge, it is perhaps not fanciful to see in Luke's speaking of them as 'souls' a hint that, in general, the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah was deep and real. Not only were three thousand 'names' added to the hundred and twenty, but three thousand souls.

III. The fair picture of the morning brightness, so soon overclouded, so long lost, follows. First, the narrative tells how the raw converts were incorporated in the community, and assimilated to its character. They, too, 'continued steadfastly' (Acts i. 14). Note the four points enumerated: 'teaching,' which would be principally instruction in the life of Jesus and His Messianic dignity, as proved by prophecy; 'fellowship,' which implies community of disposition and oneness of heart manifested in outward association; 'breaking of bread,'—that is, the observance of the Lord's Supper; and 'the prayers,' which were the very life-breath of the infant Church (i. 14).

Thus oneness in faith and in love, participation in the memorial feast and in devotional acts bound the new converts to the original believers, and trained them towards maturity. These are still the methods by which a sudden influx of converts is best dealt with, and babes in Christ nurtured to full growth. Alas! that so often churches do not know what to do with novices when they come in numbers.

A wider view of the state of the community as a whole closes the chapter. It is the first of several landing-places, as it were, on which Luke pauses to sum up an epoch. A reverent awe laid hold of the popular mind, which was increased by the miraculous powers of the Apostles. The Church will produce that impression on the world in proportion as it is manifestly filled with the Spirit. Do we? The so-called community of goods was not imposed by commandment, as is plain from Peter's recognition of Ananias' right to do as he chose with his property. The facts that Mark's mother, Mary, had a house of her own, and that Barnabas, her relative, is specially signalised as having sold his property, prove that it was not universal. It was an irrepressible outcrop of the brotherly feeling that filled all hearts. Christ has not come to lay down laws, but to give impulses. Compelled communism is not the repetition of that oneness of sympathy which effloresced in the bright flower of this common possession of individual goods. But neither is the closed purse, closed because the heart is shut, which puts to shame so much profession of brotherhood, justified because the liberality of the primitive disciples was not by constraint nor of obligation, but willing and spontaneous.

Verses 46 and 47 add an outline of the beautiful daily

life of the community, which was, like their liberality, the outcome of the feeling of brotherhood, intensified by the sense of the gulf between them and the crooked generation from which they had separated themselves. Luke shows it on two sides. Though they had separated from the nation, they clung to the Temple services, as they continued to do till the end. They had not come to clear consciousness of all that was involved in their discipleship. It was not God's will that the new spirit should violently break with the old letter. Convulsions are not His way, except as second-best. The disciples had to stay within the fold of Israel, if they were to influence Israel. The time of outward parting between the Temple and the Church was far ahead yet.

But the truest life of the infant Church was not nourished in the Temple, but in the privacy of their homes. They were one family, and lived as such. Their 'breaking bread at home' includes both their ordinary meals and the Lord's Supper; for in these first days every meal, at least the evening meal of every day, was hallowed by having the Supper as a part of it. Each meal was thus a religious act, a token of brotherhood, and accompanied with praise. Surely *then* 'men did eat angels' food,' and on platter and cup was written 'Holiness to the Lord.' The ideal of human fellowship was realised, though but for a moment, and on a small scale. It was inevitable that divergences should arise, but it was not inevitable that the Church should depart so far from the brief brightness of its dawn. Still the sweet concordant brotherhood of these morning hours witnesses what Christian love can do, and prophesies what shall yet be and shall not pass.

No wonder that such a Church won favour with

all the people! We hear nothing of its evangelising activity, but its life was such that, without recorded speech, multitudes were drawn into so sweet a fellowship. If we were like the Pentecostal Christians, we should attract wearied souls out of the world's Babel into the calm home where love and brotherhood reigned, and God would 'add' to us 'day by day those that were being saved.'

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'—ACTS ii. 36.

It is no part of my purpose at this time to consider the special circumstances under which these words were spoken, nor even to enter upon an exposition of their whole scope. I select them for one reason, the occurrence in them of the three names by which we designate our Saviour—Jesus, Lord, Christ. To us they are very little more than three proper names; they were very different to these men who listened to the characteristically vehement discourse of the Apostle Peter. It wanted some courage to stand up at Pentecost and proclaim on the housetop what he had spoken in the ear long ago, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!' To most of his listeners to say 'Jesus is the Christ' was folly, and to say 'Jesus is the Lord' was blasphemy.

The three names are names of the same Person, but they proclaim altogether different aspects of His work and His character. The name 'Jesus' is the name of the Man, and brings to us a Brother; the name 'Christ' is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer; the

name 'Lord' is the name of dignity, and brings to us a King.

I. First, then, the name Jesus is the name of the Man, and tells us of a Brother.

There were many men in Palestine who bore the name of 'Jesus' when He bore it. We find that one of the early Christians had it; and it comes upon us with almost a shock when we read that 'Jesus, called Justus,' was the name of one of the friends of the Apostle Paul (Col. iv. 11). But, through reverence on the part of Christians, and through horror on the part of Jews, the name ceased to be a common one; and its disappearance from familiar use has hid from us the fact of its common employment at the time when our Lord bore it. Though it was given to Him as indicative of His office of saving His people from their sins, yet none of all the crowds who knew Him as Jesus of Nazareth supposed that in His name there was any greater significance than in those of the 'Simons,' 'Johns,' and 'Judahs' in the circle of His disciples.

Now the use of Jesus as the proper name of our Lord is very noticeable. In the Gospels, as a rule, it stands alone hundreds of times, whilst in combination with any other of the titles it is rare. 'Jesus Christ,' for instance, only occurs, if I count aright, twice in Matthew, once in Mark, twice in John. But if you turn to the Epistles and the latter books of the Scriptures, the proportions are reversed. There you have a number of instances of the occurrence of such combinations as 'Jesus Christ,' 'Christ Jesus,' 'The Lord Jesus,' 'Christ the Lord,' and more rarely the full solemn title, 'The Lord Jesus Christ,' but the occurrence of the proper name 'Jesus' alone is the exception. So far as I know, there are only some thirty or forty

instances of its use singly in the whole of the books of the New Testament outside of the four Evangelists. The occasions where it is used are all of them occasions in which one may see that the writer's intention is to put strong emphasis, for some reason or other, on the Manhood of our Lord Jesus, and to assert, as broadly as may be, His entire participation with us in the common conditions of our human nature, corporeal and mental.

And I think I shall best bring out the meaning and worth of the name by putting a few of these instances before you.

For example, more than once we find phrases like these: 'we believe that *Jesus* died,' 'having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of *Jesus*,' and the like—which emphasise His death as the death of a man like ourselves, and bring us close to the historical reality of His human pains and agonies for us. '*Christ* died' is a statement which makes the purpose and efficacy of His death more plain, but '*Jesus* died' shows us His death as not only the work of the appointed Messiah, but as the act of our brother man, the outcome of His human love, and never rightly to be understood if His work be thought of apart from His personality.

There is brought into view, too, prominently, the side of Christ's sufferings which we are all apt to forget—the common human side of His agonies and His pains. I know that a certain school of preachers, and some unctuous religious hymns, and other forms of composition, dwell, a great deal too much for reverence, upon the mere physical aspect of Christ's sufferings. But the temptation, I believe, with most of us is to dwell too little upon that,—to argue about the death of Christ, to think about it as a matter of speculation, to regard

it as a mysterious power, to look upon it as an official act of the Messiah who was sent into the world for us; and to forget that He bore a manhood like our own, a body that was impatient of pains and wounds and sufferings, and a human life which, like all human lives, naturally recoiled and shrank from the agony of death.

And whilst, therefore, the great message, 'It is Christ that died,' is ever to be pondered, we have also to think with sympathy and gratitude on the homelier representation coming nearer to our hearts, which proclaims that 'Jesus died.' Let us not forget the Brother's manhood that had to agonise and to suffer and to die as the price of our salvation.

Again, when the Scripture would set our Lord before us, as in His humanity, our pattern and example, it sometimes uses this name, in order to give emphasis to the thought of His Manhood—as, for example, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith.' That is to say—a mighty stimulus to all brave perseverance in our efforts after higher Christian nobleness lies in the vivid and constant realisation of the true manhood of our Lord, as the type of all goodness, as having Himself lived by faith, and that in a perfect degree and manner. We are to turn away our eyes from contemplating all other lives and motives, and to 'look off' from them to Him. In all our struggles let us think of Him. Do not take poor human creatures for your ideal of excellence, nor tune your harps to their keynotes. To imitate men is degradation, and is sure to lead to deformity. None of them is a safe guide. Black veins are in the purest marble, and flaws in the most lustrous diamonds. But to imitate Jesus is freedom, and to be like Him is

perfection. Our code of morals is His life. He is the Ideal incarnate. The secret of all progress is, 'Run—looking unto Jesus.'

Then, again, we have His manhood emphasised when His sympathy is to be commended to our hearts. 'The great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens' is '*Jesus*' . . . 'who was in all points tempted like as we are.' To every sorrowing soul, to all men burdened with heavy tasks, unwelcome duties, pains and sorrows of the imagination, or of the heart, or of memory, or of physical life, or of circumstances—to all there comes the thought, 'Every ill that flesh is heir to' He knows by experience, and in the Man Jesus we find not only the pity of a God, but the sympathy of a Brother.

When one of our princes goes for an afternoon into the slums in East London, everybody says, and says deservedly, 'right!' and 'princely!' *This* prince has learned pity in 'the huts where poor men lie,' and knows by experience all their squalor and misery. The Man Jesus is the sympathetic Priest. The Rabbis, who did not usually see very far into the depth of things, yet caught a wonderful glimpse when they said: 'Messias will be found sitting outside the gate of the city *amongst the lepers*.' That is where He sits; and the perfectness of His sympathy, and the completeness of His identification of Himself with all our tears and our sorrows, are taught us when we read that our High Priest is not merely Christ the Official, but Jesus the Man.

And then we find such words as these: 'If we believe that *Jesus* died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him': I think any one that reads with sympathy must feel

how very much closer to our hearts that consolation comes, 'Jesus rose again,' than even the mighty word which the Apostle uses on another occasion, 'Christ is risen from the dead.' The one tells us of the risen Redeemer, the other tells us of the risen Brother. And wherever there are sorrowing souls, enduring loss and following their dear ones into the darkness with yearning hearts, they are comforted when they feel that the beloved dead lie down beside their Brother, and with their Brother they shall rise again.

So, again, most strikingly, and yet somewhat singularly, in the words of Scripture which paint most loftily the exaltation of the risen Saviour to the right hand of God, and His wielding of absolute power and authority, it is the old human name that is used; as if the writers would bind together the humiliation and the exaltation, and were holding up hands of wonder at the thought that a Man had risen thus to the Throne of the Universe. What an emphasis and glow of hope there is in such words as these: 'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see *Jesus*'—the very Man that was here with us—'crowned with glory and honour.' So in the Book of the Revelation the chosen name for Him who sits amidst the glories of the heavens, and settles the destinies of the universe, and orders the course of history, is Jesus. As if the Apostle would assure us that the face which looked down upon him from amidst the blaze of the glory was indeed the face that he knew long ago upon earth, and the breast that 'was girded with a golden girdle' was the breast upon which he so often had leaned his happy head.

So the ties that bind us to the Man Jesus should be the human bonds that knit us to one another, trans-

ferred to Him and purified and strengthened. All that we have failed to find in men we can find in Him. Human wisdom has its limits, but here is a Man whose word is truth, who is Himself the truth. Human love is sometimes hollow, often impotent; it looks down upon us, as a great thinker has said, like the Venus of Milo, that lovely statue, smiling in pity, but it has no arms. But here is a love that is mighty to help, and on which we can rely without disappointment or loss. Human excellence is always limited and imperfect, but here is One whom we may imitate and be pure. So let us do like that poor woman in the Gospel story—bring our precious alabaster box of ointment—the love of these hearts of ours, which is the most precious thing we have to give. The box of ointment that we have so often squandered upon unworthy heads—let us come and pour it upon His, not unmingled with our tears, and anoint Him, our beloved and our King. This Man has loved each of us with a brother's heart; let us love Him with all our hearts.

II. So much for the first name. The second—'Christ'—is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer.

I need not dwell at any length upon the original significance and force of the name; it is familiar, of course, to us all. It stands as a transference into Greek of the Hebrew Messiah; the one and the other meaning, as we all know, the 'Anointed.' But what is the meaning of claiming for Jesus that He is anointed? A sentence will answer the question. It means that He fulfils all which the inspired imagination of the great ones of the past had seen in that dim Figure that rose before prophet and psalmist. It means that He is anointed or inspired by the divine indwelling to be Prophet, Priest, and King all over

the world. It means that He is—though the belief had faded away from the minds of His generation—a sufferer whilst a Prince, and appointed to ‘turn away unrighteousness’ from the world, and not from ‘Jacob’ only, by a sacrifice and a death.

I cannot see less in the contents of the Jewish idea, the prophetic idea, of the Messias, than these points: divine inspiration or anointing; a sufferer who is to redeem; the fulfiller of all the rapturous visions of psalmist and of prophet in the past.

And so, when Peter stood up amongst that congregation of wondering strangers and scowling Pharisees, and said, ‘The Man that died on the Cross, the Rabbi-peasant from half-heathen Galilee, is the Person to whom Law and Prophets have been pointing,’—no wonder that no one believed him except those whose hearts were touched, for it is never possible for the common mind, at any epoch, to believe that a man who stands beside them is very much bigger than themselves. Great men have always to die, and get a halo of distance around them, before their true stature can be seen.

And now two remarks are all I can afford myself upon this point, and one is this: the hearty recognition of His Messiahship is the centre of all discipleship. The earliest and the simplest Christian creed, which yet—like the little brown roll in which the infant beech-leaves lie folded up—contains in itself all the rest, was this: ‘Jesus is Christ.’ Although it is no part of my business to say how much imperfection and confusion of head comprehension may co-exist with a heart acceptance of Jesus that saves a soul from sin, yet I cannot in faithfulness to my own convictions conceal my belief that he who contents himself with ‘Jesus’ and does not grasp ‘Christ’ has cast away the most

valuable and characteristic part of the Christianity which he professes. Surely a most simple inference is that a *Christian* is at least a man who recognises the Christship of Jesus. And I press that upon you, my friends. It is not enough for the sustenance of your own souls and for the cultivation of a vigorous religious life that men should admire, howsoever profoundly and deeply, the humanity of the Lord unless that humanity leads them on to see the office of the Messiah to whom their whole hearts cleave. 'Jesus is the Christ' is the minimum Christian creed.

And then, still further, let me remind you how the recognition of Jesus as Christ is essential to giving its full value to the facts of the manhood. 'Jesus died!' Yes. What then? What is that to me? Is that all that I have to say? If His is simply a human death, like all others, I want to know what makes the story of it a Gospel. I want to know what more interest I have in it than I have in the death of Socrates, or in the death of any man or woman whose name was in the obituary column of yesterday's newspaper. 'Jesus died.' That is a fact. What is wanted to turn the fact into a gospel? That I shall know who it was that died, and why He died. 'I declare unto you the gospel which I preach,' Paul says, 'how that *Christ* died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.' The belief that the death of Jesus was the death of the Christ is needful in order that it shall be the means of my deliverance from the burden of sin. If it be only the death of Jesus, it is beautiful, pathetic, as many another martyr's has been, but if it be the death of Christ, then 'my faith can lay her hand' on that great Sacrifice 'and know her guilt was there.'

So in regard to His perfect example. If we only see

His manhood when we are 'looking unto Jesus,' the contemplation of His perfection would be as paralysing as spectacles of supreme excellence usually are. But when we can say, '*Christ* also suffered for us, leaving us an example,' and so can deepen the thought of His Manhood into that of His Messiahship, and the conception of His work as example into that of His work as sacrifice, we can hope that His divine power will dwell in us to mould our lives to the likeness of His human life of perfect obedience.

So in regard to His Resurrection and glorious Ascension to the right hand of God. We have not only to think of the solitary man raised from the grave and caught up to the throne. If it were only 'Jesus' who rose and ascended, His Resurrection and Ascension might be as much to us as the raising of Lazarus, or the rapture of Elijah—namely, a demonstration that death did not destroy conscious being, and that a man could rise to heaven; but they would be no more. But if '*Christ* is risen from the dead,' He is 'become the first-fruits of them that slept.' If *Jesus* has gone up on high, others may or may not follow in His train. He may show that manhood is not incapable of elevation to heaven, but has no power to draw others up after Him. But if *Christ* is gone up, He is gone to prepare a place for us, not to fill a solitary throne, and His Ascension is the assurance that He will lift us too to dwell with Him and share His triumph over death and sin.

Most of the blessedness and beauty of His Example, all the mystery and meaning of His Death, and all the power of His Resurrection, depend on the fact that 'it is *Christ* that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God.'

III. 'The Lord' is the name of dignity and brings before us the King.

There are three grades, so to speak, of dignity expressed by this one word 'Lord' in the New Testament. The lowest is that in which it is almost the equivalent of our own English title of respectful courtesy, 'Sir,' in which sense it is often used in the Gospels, and applied to our Lord as to many other of the persons there. The second is that in which it expresses dignity and authority—and in that sense it is frequently applied to Christ. The third and highest is that in which it is the equivalent of the Old Testament 'Lord,' as a divine name; in which sense also it is applied to Christ in the New Testament.

The first and last of these may be left out of consideration now: the central one is the meaning of the word here. I have only time to touch upon two thoughts—to connect this name of dignity first with one and then with the other of the two names that we have already considered.

Jesus is Lord, that is to say, wonderful as it is, His manhood is exalted to supreme dignity. It is the teaching of the New Testament, that in Jesus, the Child of Mary, our nature sits on the throne of the universe and rules over all things. Those rude herdsmen, brothers of Joseph, who came into Pharaoh's palace—strange contrast to their tents!—there found their brother ruling over that ancient and highly civilised land! We have the Man Jesus for the Lord over all. Trust His dominion and rejoice in His rule, and bow before His authority. Jesus is Lord.

Christ is Lord. That is to say: His sovereign authority and dominion are built upon the fact of His being Deliverer, Redeemer, Sacrifice. His Kingdom

is a Kingdom that rests upon His suffering. 'Wherefore God also hath exalted Him, and given Him a Name that is above every name.'

It is because He wears a vesture dipped in blood, that 'on the vesture is the name written "King of kings, and Lord of lords."' It is 'because He shall deliver the needy when he crieth,' as the prophetic psalm has it, that 'all kings shall fall down before Him and all nations shall serve Him.' Because He has given His life for the world He is the Master of the World. His humanity is raised to the throne because His humanity stooped to the cross. As long as men's hearts can be touched by absolute unselfish surrender, and as long as they can know the blessedness of responsive surrender, so long will He who gave Himself for the world be the Sovereign of the world, and the First-born from the dead be the Prince of all the kings of the earth.

And so, dear friends, our thoughts to-day all point to this lesson—do not you content yourselves with a maimed Christ. Do not tarry in the Manhood; do not think it enough to cherish reverence for the nobility of His soul, the gentle wisdom of His words, the beauty of His character, the tenderness of His compassion. All these will be insufficient for your needs. There is more in His mission than these—even His death for you and for all men. Take Him for your Christ, but do not lose the Person in the Work, any more than you lose the work in the Person. And be not content with an intellectual recognition of Him, but bring Him the faith which cleaves to Him and His work as its only hope and peace, and the love which, because of His work as Christ, flows out to the beloved Person who has done it all. Thus loving

Jesus and trusting Christ, you will bring obedience to your Lord and homage to your King, and learn the sweetness and power of 'the name that is above every name'—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we all be able, with clear and unfaltering conviction of our understandings and loving affiance of our whole souls, to repeat as our own the grand words in which so many centuries have proclaimed their faith—words which shed a spell of peacefulness over stormy lives, and fling a great light of hope into the black jaws of the grave: 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord!'

A FOURFOLD CORD

'And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.'—ACTS ii. 42.

THE Early Church was not a pattern for us, and the idea of its greatly superior purity is very largely a delusion. But still, though that be true, the occasional glimpses that we get at intervals in the early chapters of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles do present a very instructive and beautiful picture of what a Christian society may be, and therefore of what Christian Churches and Christian individuals ought to be.

The words that I have read, however, are not the description of the demeanour of the whole community, but of that portion of it which had been added so swiftly to the original nucleus on the Day of Pentecost. Think, on the morning of that day 'the number of the names was one hundred and twenty,' on the evening of that day it was three thousand over that number—a sufficiently swift and large increase to have swamped

the original nucleus, unless there had been a great power of assimilation to itself lodged in that little body. These new converts held to the Apostolic 'doctrine' and 'fellowship,' and to 'breaking of bread' and to 'prayers,' and so became homogeneous with the others, and all worked to one end.

Now, these four points which are signalised in this description may well afford us material for consideration. They give us the ideal of a Church's inner life, which in the divine order should precede, and be the basis of, a Church's work in the world. But, while we speak of an ideal for a Church, let us not forget that it is realised only by the lives of individuals being conformed to it.

I. The first point, which is fundamental to all the others, is 'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.'

An earnest desire after fuller knowledge is the basis of all healthy Christian life. We cannot realise, without a great effort, the ignorance of these new converts. 'Parthians and Medes and Elamites,' and Jews gathered from every corner of the Roman world, they had come up to Jerusalem, and the bulk of them knew no more about Christ and Christianity than what they picked up out of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. But that was enough to change their hearts and their wills and to lead them to a real faith. And though the *contents* of their faith were very incomplete, the *power* of their faith was very great. For there is no necessary connection between the amount believed and the grasp with which it is held. Believing, they were eager for more light to be poured on to their half-seeing eyes. They had no Gospels, they had no written record, they had no means of learning anything about the faith

which they were now professing except listening to one or other of the original Eleven, with the addition of any of the other 'old disciples'—that is, *early* disciples—who might perchance have equal claims to be listened to as 'witnesses from the beginning.' We shall very much misunderstand the meaning of the words here, if we suppose that these novices were dosed with theological instruction, or that 'the Apostles' doctrine' consisted of such fully developed truths as we find later on in Paul's writings. If you will look at the first sermons that Peter is recorded as having delivered, in the early chapters of the Acts, you will find that he by no means enunciates a definite theology such as he unfolds in his later Epistle. There is no word about the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; His designation is 'Thy holy child Jesus.' There is no word about the atoning nature of Christ's sacrifice; His death is simply the great crime of the Jewish people, and His Resurrection the great divine fact witnessing to the truth of His Messiahship. All that which we now regard, and rightly regard, as the very centre and living focus of divine truth was but beginning to shine out on the Apostles' minds, or rather to gather itself into form, and to shape itself by slow degrees into propositions. 'The Apostles' teaching'—for 'doctrine' does not convey to modern ears what Luke meant by the word—must have been very largely, if not exclusively, of the same kind as is preserved to us in the four Gospels, and especially in the first three of them. The recital to these listeners, to whom it was all so fresh and strange and transcendent, of the story that has become worn and commonplace to us by its familiarity, of Christ in His birth, Christ in His gentleness, Christ in His deeds, Christ in the deep words that the Apostles were only

beginning to understand; Christ in His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension—these were the themes on the narration of which this company of three thousand waited with such eagerness.

But, of course, there was necessarily involved in the story a certain amount of what we now call doctrine—that is, theological teaching—because one cannot tell the story of Jesus Christ, as it is told in the four Gospels, without impressing upon the hearers the conviction that His nature was divine and that His death was a sacrifice. Beyond these truths we know not how far the Apostles went. To these, perhaps, they did not at first rise. But whether they did so or no, and although the facts that the hearers were thus eager to receive, and treasured when they received, are the common-places of our Sunday-schools, and quite uninteresting to many of us, the spirit which marked these early converts is the spirit that must lie at the foundation of progressive and healthy Christianity in us. The consciousness of our own ignorance, of the great sweep of God's revealed mind and will, the eager desire to fill up the gaps in the circle, and to widen the diameter, of our knowledge, and the consequent steadfastness and persistence of our continuance in the teachings—far fuller and deeper and richer and nobler than were heard in the upper room at Jerusalem by the first three thousand—which, through the divine Spirit and the experience of the Church for nineteen hundred years are available for us, ought to characterise us all.

Now, dear friends, ask yourselves the question very earnestly, Does this desire of fuller Christian knowledge at all mark my Christian character, and does it practically influence my Christian conduct and life? There are thousands of men and women in all our churches

who know no more about the rich revelation of God in Jesus Christ than they did on that day long, long ago, when first they began to apprehend that He was the Saviour of their souls. When I sometimes get glimpses into the utter Biblical ignorance of educated members of my own and of other congregations, I am appalled ; I do not wonder how we ministers do so little by our preaching, when the minds of the people to whom we speak are so largely in such a chaotic state in reference to Scriptural truth. I believe that there is an intolerance of plain, sober, instructive Christian teaching from the pulpit, which is one of the worst signs of the Christianity of this generation. And I believe that there are a terribly large number of professing Christians, and good people after a fashion, whose Bibles are as clean to-day, except on one or two favourite pages, as they were when they came out of the bookseller's shop years and years ago. You will never be strong Christians, you will never be happy ones, until you make conscience of the study of God's Word and 'continue steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching.' You may produce plenty of emotional Christianity, and of busy and sometimes fussy work without it, but you will not get depth. I sometimes think that the complaint of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews might be turned upside down nowadays. He says: 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles.' Nowadays we might say in Sunday-schools and other places of church work: 'When for the time ye ought to be *learners*, you have taken to teaching before you know what you are teaching, and so neither you nor your scholars will profit much.' The vase should be full before you begin to empty it.

Again, there ought to be, and we ought to aim after, an equable temper of mutual brotherhood conquering selfishness.

‘They continued in the Apostles’ doctrine and in fellowship.’ ‘Fellowship’ here, as I take it, applies to community of feeling. A verse or two afterwards it is applied to community of goods, but we have nothing to do with that subject at present. What is meant is that these three thousand, as was most natural, cut off altogether from their ancient associations, finding themselves at once separated by a great gulf from their nation and its hopes and its religion, were driven together as sheep are when wolves are prowling around. And, being individually weak, they held on by one another, so that many weaknesses might make a strength, and glimmering embers raked together might break into a flame.

Now, all these circumstances, or almost all of them, that drove the primitive believers together, are at an end, and the tendencies of this day are rather to drive Christian people apart than to draw them together. Differences of position, occupation, culture, ways of looking at things, views of Christian truth and the like, all come powerfully in to the reinforcement of the natural selfishness which tempts us all, unless the grace of God overcomes it. Although we do not want any hysterical or histrionic presentation of Christian sympathy and brotherhood, we do need—far more than any of us have awakened to the consciousness of the need—for the health of our own souls we need to make definite efforts to cultivate more of that sense of Christian brotherhood with all that hold the same Lord Christ, and to realise this truth: that they and we, however separate, are nearer one another than are

we and those nearest to us who do not share in our Christian faith.

I do not dwell upon this point. It is one on which it is easy to gush, and it has got a bad name because there has been so much unreal and sickly talk about it. But if any Christian man will honestly try to cultivate the brotherly feeling which my text suggests, and to which our common relation to Jesus Christ binds us, and will try it in reference to *A*, *B*, or *C*, whom he does not much like, with whose ways he has no kind of sympathy, whom he believes to be a heretic, and who perhaps returns the belief about him with interest, he will find it is a pretty sharp test of his Christian principle. Let us be real, at any rate, and not pretend to have more love than we really have in our hearts. And let us remember that 'he that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.'

II. Another characteristic which comes out in the words before us is the blending of worship with life.

'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine . . . and in breaking of bread.' Commentators who can only see one thing at a time—and there are a good many of that species—have got up great discussions as to whether this phrase means eating ordinary meals or partaking of the Lord's Supper. I venture to say it means both, because, clearly enough, in the beginning, the common meal was hallowed by what we now call the Lord's Supper being associated with it, and every day's evening repast was eaten 'in remembrance of Him.'

So, naturally, and without an idea of anything awful or sacred about the rite, the first Christians, when they went home after a hard day's work and sat down to take their own suppers, blessed the bread and the wine,

and whether they ate or drank, did the one and the other 'in remembrance of Him.'

The gradual growth of the sentiment attaching to the Lord's Supper, until it reached the portentous height of regarding it as a 'tremendous sacrifice,' which could only be administered by priests with ordained hands in Apostolic succession, can be partly traced even in New Testament times. The Lord's Supper began as an appendage to, or rather as a heightening of, the evening meal, and at first, as this chapter tells us in a subsequent verse, was observed day by day. Then, before the epoch of the Acts of the Apostles is ended, we find it has become a weekly celebration, and forms part of the service on the first day of the week. But even when the observance had ceased to be daily, the association with an ordinary meal continued, and that led to the disorders at Corinth which Paul rebuked, and which would have been impossible if later ideas of the Lord's Supper had existed then.

The history of the transformation of that simple Supper into 'the bloodless sacrifice' of the Mass, and all the mischief consequent thereon, does not concern us now. But it does concern us to note that these first believers hallowed common things by doing them, and common food by partaking of it, with the memory of His great sacrifice in their minds. The poorest fare, the coarsest bread, the sourest wine, on the humblest table, became a memorial of that dear Lord. Religion and life, the domestic and the devout, were so closely braided together that when a household sat at table it was both a family and a church; and while they were eating their meat for the strength of their body, they were partaking of the memorial of their dying Lord.

Is your house like that? Is your daily life like that? Do you bring the sacred and the secular as close together as that? Are the dying words of your Master, 'This do in remembrance of Me,' written by you over everything you do? And so is all life worship, and all worship hope?

III. The last thing here is habitual devotion.

I suppose the disciples had no forms of set Christian prayers. They still used the Jewish liturgy, for we read that 'they continued daily with one accord in the Temple.' I am sure that no two things can be less like one another than the worship of the primitive Church and the worship, say, of one of our congregations. Did you ever try to paint for yourselves, for instance, the scene described in the First Epistle to the Corinthians? When they came together in their meetings for worship, 'every one had a psalm, a doctrine, an interpretation.' 'Let the prophets speak, by ones, or at most by twos'; and if another gets up to interrupt, let the first speaker sit down. Paul goes on to say, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' So there must have been tendencies to disorder, and much at which some of our modern ecclesiastical martinets would have been very much scandalised as 'unbecoming.' Wise men are in no haste to change forms. Forms change of themselves when their users change; but it would be a good day for Christendom if the faith and devoutness of a community of believers such as we, for instance, profess to be, were so strong and so demanding expression as that, instead of my poor voice continually sounding here, every one of you had a psalm or a doctrine, and every one of you were able and impelled to speak out of the fulness of the Spirit which

God poured into you. It will come some day; it must come if Christendom is not to die of its own dignity. But we do not need to hurry matters, only let us remember that unless a Church continues steadfast in prayer it is worth very little.

Now, dear brethren, it is said about us Free Churchmen that we think a great deal too much of preaching and a great deal too little of the prayers of the congregation. That is a stock criticism. I am bound to say that there is a grain of truth in it, and that there is not, with too many of our congregations, as lofty a conception of the power and blessedness of the united prayers of the congregation as there ought to be, or else you would not hear about 'introductory services.' Introductory to what? Do we speak to God merely by way of preface to one of us talking to his brethren? Is that the proper order? 'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching,' no doubt; but also 'steadfastly in prayer.' I pray you to try to make this picture of the Pentecostal converts the ideal of your own lives, and to do your best to help forward the time when it shall be the reality in this church, and in every other society of professing Christians.

A PURE CHURCH AN INCREASING CHURCH

'And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.'—ACTS II. 47.

'And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.'—(R.V.)

YOU observe that the principal alterations of these words in the Revised Version are two: the one the omission of 'the church,' the other the substitution of 'were being saved' for 'such as should be saved.' The former of these changes has an interest as suggesting

that at the early period referred to the name of 'the church' had not yet been definitely attached to the infant community, and that the word afterwards crept into the text at a time when ecclesiasticism had become a great deal stronger than it was at the date of the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. The second of the changes is of more importance. The Authorised Version's rendering suggests that salvation is a future thing, which in one aspect is partially true. The Revised Version, which is also by far the more literally accurate, suggests the other idea, that salvation is a process going on all through the course of a Christian man's life. And that carries very large and important lessons.

I. I ask you to notice here, first, the profound conception which the writer had of the present action of the ascended Christ. 'The Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.'

Then Christ (for it is He that is here spoken of as the Lord), the living, ascended Christ, was present in, and working with, that little community of believing souls. You will find that the thought of a present Saviour, who is the life-blood of the Church on earth, and the spring of action for all good that is done in it and by it, runs through the whole of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles. The keynote is struck in its first verses: 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up.' That is the description of Luke's Gospel, and it implies that the Acts of the Apostles is the *second* treatise, which tells all that Jesus continued to do and teach *after* that He was taken up. So the Lord, the ascended Christ, is the true theme and hero

of this book. It is He, for instance, who sends down the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is He whom the dying martyr sees 'standing at the right hand of God,' ready to help. It is He who appears to the persecutor on the road to Damascus. It is He who sends Paul and his company to preach in Europe. It is He who opens hearts for the reception of their message. It is He who stands by the Apostle in a vision, and bids him 'be of good cheer,' and go forth upon his work. Thus, at every crisis in the history of the Church, it is the Lord—that is to say, Christ Himself—who is revealed as working in them and for them, the ascended but yet ever-present Guide, Counsellor, Inspirer, Protector, and Rewarder of them that put their trust in Him. So here it is He that 'adds to the Church daily them that were being saved.'

I believe, dear brethren, that modern Christianity has far too much lost the vivid impression of this present Christ as actually dwelling and working among us. What is good in us and what is bad in us conspire to make us think more of the past work of an ascended Christ than of the present work of an indwelling Christ. We cannot think too much of that Cross by which He has laid the foundation for the salvation and reconciliation of all the world; but we may easily think too exclusively of it, and so fix our thoughts upon that work which He completed when on Calvary He said, 'It is finished!' as to forget the continual work which will never be finished until His Church is perfected, and the world is redeemed. If we are a Church of Christ at all, we have Christ in very deed among us, and working through us and on us. And unless we have, in no mystical and unreal and metaphorical sense, but in the simplest and yet grandest prose reality, that living

Saviour here in our hearts and in our fellowship, better that these walls were levelled with the ground, and this congregation scattered to the four winds of heaven. The present Christ is the life of His Church.

Notice, and that but for a moment, for I shall have to deal with it more especially at another part of this discourse,—the specific action which is here ascribed to Him. *He* adds to the Church, not *we*, not our preaching, not our eloquence, our fervour, our efforts. These may be the weapons in His hands, but the hand that wields the weapon gives it all its power to wound and to heal, and it is Christ Himself who, by His present energy, is here represented as being the Agent of all the good that is done by any Christian community, and the Builder-up of His Churches, in numbers and in power.

It is His will for, His ideal of, a Christian Church, that continuously it should be gathering into its fellowship those that are being saved. That is His meaning in the establishment of His Church upon earth, and that is His will concerning it and concerning us, and the question should press on every society of Christians: Does our reality correspond to Christ's ideal? Are we, as a portion of His great heritage, being continually replenished by souls that come to tell what God has done for them? Is there an unbroken flow of such into what we call our communion? I speak to you members of this church, and I ask you to ponder the question,—Is it so? and the other question, If it is not so, wherefore? 'The Lord added daily,'—why does not the Lord add daily to us?

II. Let us go to the second part of this text, and see if we can find an answer. Notice how emphatically there is brought out here the attractive power of an earnest and pure Church.

My text is the end of a sentence. What is the beginning of the sentence? Listen,—‘All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added.’ Yes; of course. Suppose you were like these people. Suppose this church and congregation bore stamped upon it, plain and deep as the broad arrow of the king, these characteristics—manifest fraternal unity, plain unselfish unworldliness, habitual unbroken devotion, gladness which had in it the solemnity of Heaven, and a transparent simplicity of life and heart, which knew nothing of by-ends and shabby, personal motives or distracting duplicity of purpose—do you not think that the Lord would add to you daily such as should be saved? Or, to put it into other words, wherever there is a little knot of men obviously held together by a living Christ, and obviously manifesting in their lives and characters the likeness of that Christ transforming and glorifying them, there will be drawn to them—by natural gravitation, I was going to say, but we may more correctly say, by the gravitation which is natural in the supernatural realm—souls that have been touched by the grace of the Lord, and souls to whom that grace has been brought the nearer by looking upon *them*. Wherever there is inward vigour of life there will be outward growth; and the Church which is pure, earnest, living will be a Church which spreads and increases.

Historically, it has always been the case that in

God's Church seasons of expansion have followed upon seasons of deepened spiritual life on the part of His people. And the only kind of growth which is wholesome, and to be desired in a Christian community, is growth as a consequence of the revived religiousness of the individuals who make up the community.

And just in like manner as such a community will draw to it men who are like-minded, so it will repel from it all the formalist people. There are congregations that have the stamp of worldliness so deep upon them that any persons who want to be burdened with as little religion as may be respectable will find themselves at home there. And I come to you Christian people here, for whose Christian character I am in some sense and to some degree responsible, with this appeal: Do you see to it that, so far as your influence extends, this community of ours be such as that half-dead Christians will never think of coming near us, and those whose religion is tepid will be repelled from us, but that they who love the Lord Jesus Christ with earnest devotion and lofty consecration, and seek to live unworldly and saint-like lives, shall recognise in us men like-minded, and from whom they may draw help. I beseech you—if you will not misunderstand the expression—make your communion such that it will repel as well as attract; and that people will find nothing here to draw them to an easy religion of words and formalism, beneath which all vermin of worldliness and selfishness may lurk, but will recognise in us a church of men and women who are bent upon holiness, and longing for more and more conformity to the divine Master.

Now, if all this be true, it is possible for worldly and stagnant communities calling themselves 'Churches' to

thwart Christ's purpose, and to make it both impossible and undesirable that He should add to them souls for whom He has died. It is a solemn thing to feel that we may clog Christ's chariot-wheels, that there may be so little spiritual life in us, as a congregation, that, if I may so say, He dare not intrust us with the responsibility of guarding and keeping the young converts whom He loves and tends. We may not be fit to be trusted with them, and that may be why we do not get them. It may not be good for them that they should be dropped into the refrigerating atmosphere of such a church, and that may be why they do not come.

Depend upon it, brethren, that, far more than my preaching, your lives will determine the expansion of this church of ours. And if my preaching is pulling one way and your lives the other, and I have half an hour a week for talk and you have seven days for contradictory life, which of the two do you think is likely to win in the tug? I beseech you, take the words that I am now trying to speak, to yourselves. Do not pass them to the man in the next pew and think how well they fit him, but accept them as needed by you. And remember, that just as a bit of sealing-wax, if you rub it on your sleeve and so warm it, develops an attractive power, the Church which is warmed will draw many to itself. If the earlier words of this context apply to any Christian community, then certainly its blessed promise too will apply to it, and to such a church the Lord will 'add day by day them that are being saved.'

III. And now, lastly, observe the definition given here of the class of persons gathered into the community.

I have already observed, in the earlier portion of this discourse, that here we have salvation represented as a process, a progressive thing which runs on all through life. In the New Testament there are various points of view from which that great idea of salvation is represented. It is sometimes spoken of as past, in so far as in the definite act of conversion and the first exercise of faith in Jesus Christ the whole subsequent evolution and development are involved, and the process of salvation has its beginning then, when a man turns to God. It is sometimes spoken of as present, in so far as the joy of deliverance from evil and possession of good, which is God, is realised day by day. It is sometimes spoken of as future, in so far as all the imperfect possession and pre-libations of salvation which we taste here on earth prophesy and point onwards to their own perfecting in the climax of heaven. But all these three points of view, past, present, and future, may be merged into this one of my text, which speaks of every saint on earth, from the infantile to the most mature, as standing in the same row, though at different points; walking on the same road, though advanced different distances; all participant of the same process of 'being saved.'

Through all life the deliverance goes on, the deliverance from sin, the deliverance from wrath. The Christian salvation, then, according to the teaching of this emphatic phrase, is a process begun at conversion, carried on progressively through the life, and reaching its climax in another state. Day by day, through the spring and the early summer, the sun shines longer in the sky, and rises higher in the heavens; and the path of the Christian is as the shining light. Last year's greenwood is this year's hardwood; and the Christian, in

like manner, has to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour.' So these progressively, and, therefore, as yet imperfectly, saved people, were gathered into the Church.

Now I have but two things to say about that. If that be the description of the kind of folk that come into a Christian Church, the duties of that Church are very plainly marked. And the first great one is to see to it that the community help the growth of its members. There are Christian Churches—I do not say whether ours is one of them or not—into which, if a young plant is brought, it is pretty sure to be killed. The temperature is so low that the tender shoots are nipped as with frost, and die. I have seen people, coming all full of fervour and of faith, into Christian congregations, and finding that the average round them was so much lower than their own, that they have cooled down after a time to the fashionable temperature, and grown indifferent like their brethren. Let us, dear friends, remember that a Christian Church is a nursery of imperfect Christians, and, for ourselves and for one another, try to make our communion such as shall help shy and tender graces to unfold themselves, and woo out, by the encouragement of example, the lowest and the least perfect to lofty holiness and consecration like the Master's.

And if I am speaking to any in this congregation who hold aloof from Christian fellowship for more or less sufficient reasons, let me press upon them, in one word, that if they are conscious of a possession, however imperfect, of that incipient salvation, their place is thereby determined, and they are doing wrong if they do not connect themselves with some Christian Communion, and stand forth as members of Christ's Church.

And now one last word. I have tried to show you that salvation, in the New Testament, is regarded as a process. The opposite thing is a process too. There is a very awful contrast in one of Paul's Epistles. 'The preaching of the Cross is to them *who are in the act of perishing* foolishness; unto us who are *being saved*, it is the power of God.' These two processes start, as it were, from the same point, one by slow degrees and almost imperceptible motion, rising higher and higher, the other, by slow degrees and almost unconscious descent, sliding steadily and fatally downward ever further and further. And my point now is that in each of us one or other of these processes is going on. Either you are slowly rising or you are slipping down. Either a larger measure of the life of Christ, which is salvation, is passing into your hearts, or bit by bit you are dying like some man with creeping paralysis that begins at the extremities, and with fell, silent, inexorable footstep, advances further and further towards the citadel of the heart, where it lays its icy hand at last, and the man is dead. You are either 'being saved' or you are 'perishing.' No man becomes a devil all at once, and no man becomes an angel all at once. Trust yourself to Christ, and He will lift you to Himself; turn your back upon Him, as some of you are doing, and you will settle down, down, down in the muck and the mire of your own sensuality and selfishness, until at last the foul ooze spreads over your head, and you are lost in the bog for ever.

‘THEN SHALL THE LAME MAN LEAP AS AN HART’

‘Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. 2. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; 3. Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. 4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. 5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. 6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength. 8. And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. 9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. 11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering. 12. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? 13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. 14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15. And killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. 16. And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.’—Acts iii. 1-16.

‘MANY wonders and signs were done by the Apostles’ (Acts ii. 43), but this one is recorded in detail, both because it was conspicuous as wrought in the Temple, and because it led to weighty consequences. The narrative is so vivid and full of minute particulars that it suggests an eye-witness. Was Peter Luke’s informant? The style of the story is so like that of Mark’s Gospel that we might reasonably presume so.

The scene and the persons are first set before us. It was natural that a close alliance should be cemented between Peter and John, both because they were the principal members of the quartet which stood first among the Apostles, and because they were so unlike each other, and therefore completed each other. Peter’s

practical force and eye for externals, and John's more contemplative nature and eye for the unseen, needed one another. So we find them together in the judgment hall, at the sepulchre, and here.

They 'went up to the Temple,' or, to translate more exactly and more picturesquely, 'were going up,' when the incident to be recorded stayed them. They had passed through the court, and came to a gate leading into the inner court, which was called 'Beautiful,' from its artistic excellence, when they were arrested by the sight of a lame beggar, who had been carried there every day for many years to appeal, by the display of his helplessness, to the entering worshippers. Precisely similar sights may be seen to-day at the doors of many a famous European church and many a mosque. He mechanically wailed out his formula, apparently scarcely looking at the two strangers, nor expecting a response. Long habit and many rebuffs had not made him hopeful, but it was his business to ask, and so he asked.

Some quick touch of pity shot through the two friends' hearts, which did not need to be spoken in order that each might feel it to be shared by the other. So they paused, and, as was in keeping with their characters, Peter took speech in hand, while John stood by assenting. Purposed devotion is well delayed when postponed in order to lighten misery.

There must have been something magnetic in Peter's voice and steady gaze as he said, 'Look on us!' It was a strange preface, if only some small coin was to follow. It kindled some flicker of hope of he knew not what in the beggar. He expected to receive 'something' from them, and, no doubt, was asking himself what. Expectation and receptivity were being stirred

in him, though he could not divine what was coming. We have no right to assume that his state of mind was operative in fitting him to be cured, nor to call his attitude 'faith,' but still he was lifted from his usual dreary hopelessness, and some strange anticipation was creeping into his heart.

Then comes the grand word of power. Again Peter is spokesman, but John takes part, though silently. With a fixed gaze, which told of concentrated purpose, and went to the lame man's heart, Peter triumphantly avows what most men are ashamed of, and try to hide: 'Silver and gold have I none.' He had 'left all and followed Christ'; he had not made demands on the common stock. Empty pockets may go along with true wealth.

There is a fine flash of exultant confidence in Peter's next words, which is rather spoiled by the Authorised Version. He did not say '*such* as I have,' as if it was inferior to money, which he had not, but he said '*what* I have' (Rev. Ver.),—a very different tone. The expression eloquently magnifies the power which he possessed as far more precious than wealth, and it speaks of his assurance that he did possess it—an assurance which rested, not only on his faith in his Lord's promise and gift, but on his experience in working former miracles.

How deep his words go into the obligations of possession! 'What I have I give' should be the law for all Christians in regard to all that they have, and especially in regard to spiritual riches. God gives us these, not only in order that we may enjoy them ourselves, but in order that we may impart, and so in our measure enter into the joy of our Lord and know the greater blessedness of giving than of receiving. How often it has been true that a poor church has been a

miracle-working church, and that, when it could not say 'Silver and gold have I none,' it has also lost the power of saying, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'!

The actual miracle is most graphically narrated. With magnificent boldness Peter rolls out his Master's name, there, in the court of the Temple, careless who may hear. He takes the very name that had been used in scorn, and waves it like a banner of victory. His confidence in his possession of power was not confidence in himself, but in his Lord. When we can peal forth the Name with as much assurance of its miracle-working power as Peter did, we too shall be able to make the lame walk. A faltering voice is unworthy to speak such words, and will speak them in vain.

The process of cure is minutely described. Peter put out his hand to help the lame man up, and, while he was doing so, power came into the shrunken muscles and weak ankles, so that the cripple felt that he could raise himself, and, though all passed in a moment, the last part of his rising was his own doing, and what began with his being 'lifted up' ended in his 'leaping up.' Then came an instant of standing still, to steady himself and make sure of his new strength, and then he began to walk.

The interrupted purpose of devotion could now be pursued, but with a gladsome addition to the company. How natural is that 'walking and leaping and praising God'! The new power seemed so delightful, so wonderful, that sober walking did not serve. It was a strange way of going into the Temple, but people who are borne along by the sudden joy of new gifts beyond hope need not be expected to go quietly, and sticklers for propriety who blamed the man's extravagance, and

would have had him pace along with sober gait and downcast eyes, like a Pharisee, did not know what made him thus obstreperous, even in his devout thankfulness. 'Leaping and praising God' do make a singular combination, but before we blame, let us be sure that we understand.

One of the old manuscripts inserts a clause which brings out more clearly that there was a pause, during which the three remained in the Temple in prayer. It reads, 'And when Peter and John came out, he came out with them, holding them, and they [the people] being astonished, stood in the porch,' etc. So we have to think of the buzzing crowd, waiting in the court for their emergence from the sanctuary. Solomon's porch was, like the Beautiful gate, on the east side of the Temple enclosure, and may probably have been a usual place of rendezvous for the brethren, as it had been a resort of their Lord.

It was a great moment, and Peter, the unlearned Galilean, the former cowardly renegade, rose at once to the occasion. Truly it was given him in that hour what to speak. His sermon is distinguished by its undaunted charging home the guilt of Christ's death on the nation, its pitying recognition of the ignorance which had done the deed, and its urgent entreaty. We here deal with its beginning only. 'Why marvel ye at this?'—it would have been a marvel if they had not marvelled. The thing was no marvel to the Apostle, because he believed that Jesus was the Christ and reigned in Heaven. Miracles fall into their place and become supremely 'natural' when we have accepted that great truth.

The fervent disavowal of their 'own power or holiness' as concerned in the healing is more than a modest

disclaimer. It leads on to the declaration of who is the true Worker of all that is wrought for men by the hands of Christians. That disavowal has to be constantly repeated by us, not so much to turn away men's admiration or astonishment from us, as to guard our own foolish hearts from taking credit for what it may please Jesus to do by us as His tools.

The declaration of Christ as the supreme Worker is postponed till after the solemn indictment of the nation. But the true way to regard the miracle is set forth at once, as being God's glorifying of Jesus. Peter employs a designation of our Lord which is peculiar to these early chapters of Acts. He calls Him God's 'Servant,' which is a quotation of the Messianic title in the latter part of Isaiah, 'the Servant of the Lord.'

The fiery speaker swiftly passes to contrast God's glorifying with Israel's rejection. The two points on which he seizes are noteworthy. 'Ye delivered Him up'; that is, to the Roman power. That was the deepest depth of Israel's degradation. To hand over their Messiah to the heathen,—what could be completer faithlessness to all Israel's calling and dignity? But that was not all: 'ye denied Him.' Did Peter remember some one else than the Jews who had done the same, and did a sudden throb of conscious fellowship even in that sin make his voice tremble for a moment? Israel's denial was aggravated because it was 'in the presence of Pilate,' and had overborne his determination to release his prisoner. The Gentile judge would rise in the judgment to condemn them, for he had at least seen that Jesus was innocent, and they had hounded him on to an illegal killing, which was murder as laid to his account, but national apostasy as laid to theirs.

These were daring words to speak in the Temple to that crowd. But the humble fisherman had been filled with the Spirit, who is the Strengtheners, and the fear of man was dead in him. If we had never heard of Pentecost, we should need to invent something of the sort to make intelligible the transformation of these timid folk, the first disciples, into heroes. A dead Christ, lying in an unknown grave, could never have inspired His crushed followers with such courage, insight, and elastic confidence and gladness in the face of a frowning world.

‘THE PRINCE OF LIFE’

‘But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.’—Acts iii. 14, 15.

THIS early sermon of Peter’s, to the people, is marked by a comparative absence of the highest view of Christ’s person and work. It is open to us to take one of two explanations of that fact. We may either say that the Apostle was but learning the full significance of the marvellous events that had passed so recently, or we may say that he suited his words to his audience, and did not declare all that he knew.

At the same time, we should not overlook the significance of the Christology which it does contain. ‘His child Jesus’ is really a translation of Isaiah’s ‘Servant of the Lord.’ ‘The Holy One and the Just’ is a distinct assertion of Jesus’ perfect, sinless manhood, and ‘the Prince of Life’ plainly asserts Jesus to be the Lord and Source of it.

Notice, too, the pathetic ‘denied’: was Peter thinking of the shameful hour in his own experience? It is a

glimpse into the depth of his penitence, and the tenderness with others' sins which it had given him, that he twice uses the word here, as if he had said 'You have done no more than I did myself. It is not for me to heap reproaches on you. We have been alike in sin—and I can preach forgiveness to you sinners, because I have received it for myself.'

Notice, too, the manifold antitheses of the words. Barabbas is set against Christ; the Holy One and the Just against a robber, the Prince of Life against a murderer. 'You killed'—'the Prince of Life.' 'You killed'—'God raised.'

There are here three paradoxes, three strange and contradictory things: the paradoxes of man's perverted and fatal choice, of man's hate bringing death to the Lord of life, and of God's love and power causing life to come by death.

I. The paradox of man's fatal choice.

There occurs often in history a kind of irony in which the whole tendency of a time or of a conflict is summed up in a single act, and certainly the fact which is referred to here is one of these. Let us put it as it would have seemed to an onlooker then, leaving out for the moment any loftier meaning which may attach to it.

Peter's words here, thus boldly addressed to the people, are a strong testimony to the impression which the character of Christ had made on His contemporaries. 'The Holy One and the Just' implies moral perfection. The whole narrative of the Crucifixion brings out that impression. Pilate's wife speaks with awe of 'that just person.' 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' 'If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil.' 'I find no fault in Him.' We may take it for

granted that the impression Jesus made among His contemporaries was, at the lowest, that He was a pure and good man.

The nation had to choose one of two. Jesus was the one; who was the other? A man half brigand, half rebel, who had raised some petty revolt against Rome, more as a pretext for robbery and crime than from patriotism, and whose hands reeked with blood. And this was the nation's hero!

The juxtaposition throws a strong light on the people's motive for rejecting Jesus. The rulers may have condemned Him for blasphemy, but the people had a more practical reason, and in it no doubt the rulers shared. It was not because He claimed to be the Messiah that they gave Him up to Pilate, but because He would not meet their notions of what the Messiah should be and do. If He had called them to arms, not a man of them would have betrayed Him to Pilate, but all, or the more daring of them, would have rallied to His standard. Their hate was the measure of their deep disappointment with His course. If instead of showing love and meekness, He had blown up the coals of religious hatred; if instead of going about doing good, He had mustered the men of lawless Galilee for a revolt, would these fawning hypocrites have dragged him to Pilate on the charge of forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, and of claiming to be a King? Why, there was not one of them but would have been glad to murder every tax-gatherer in Palestine, not one of them but bore inextinguishable in his inmost heart the faith in 'one Christ a King.' And if that meek and silent martyr had only lifted His finger, He might have had legions of His accusers at His back, ready to sweep Pilate and his soldiers out of Jerusalem. They

saw Christ's goodness and holiness. It did not attract them. They wanted a Messiah who would bring them outward freedom by the use of outward weapons, and so they all shouted 'Not this man but Barabbas!' The whole history of the nation was condensed in that one cry—their untamable obstinacy, their blindness to the light of God, their fierce grasp of the promises which they did not understand, their hard worldliness, their cruel patriotism, their unquenchable hatred of their oppressors, which was only equalled by their unquenchable hatred of those who showed them the only true way for deliverance.

And this strange paradox is not confined to these Jews. It is repeated wherever Christ is presented to men. We are told that all men naturally admire goodness, and so on. Men mostly know it when they see it, but I doubt whether they all either admire or like it. People generally had rather have something more outward and tangible. It is not spiritualising this incident, but only referring it to the principle of which it is an illustration, to ask you to see in it the fatal choice of multitudes. Christ is set before us all, and His beauty is partially seen but is dimmed by externals. Men's desires are fixed on gross sensuous delights, or on success in business, or on intellectual eminence, or on some of the thousand other visible and temporal objects that outshine, to vulgar eyes, the less dazzling lustre of the things unseen. They appreciate these, and make heroes of the men who have won them. These are their ideals, but of Jesus they have little care.

And is it not true that all such competitors of His, when they lead men to prefer them to Him, are 'murderers,' in a sadder sense than Barabbas was?

Do they not slay the souls of their admirers? Is it not but too ghastly a reality that all who thus choose them draw down ruin on themselves and 'love death'?

This fatal paradox is being repeated every day in the lives of thousands. The crowds who yelled, 'Not this man but Barabbas!' were less guilty and less mad than those who to-day cry, 'Not Jesus but worldly wealth, or fleeting bodily delights, or gratified ambition!'

II. The paradox of Death's seeming conquest over the Lord of Life.

The word rendered 'Prince' means an originator, and hence a leader and hence a lord. Whether Peter had yet reached a conception of the divinity of Jesus or not, he had clearly reached a much higher one of Him than he had attained before His death. In some sense he was beginning to recognise that His relation to 'life' was loftier and more mysterious than that of other men. Was it His death only that thus elevated the disciples' thoughts of Jesus? Strange that if He died and there an end, such a result should have followed. One would have expected His death to have shattered their faith in Him, but somehow it strengthened their faith. Why did they not all continue to lament, as did the two of them on the road to Emmaus: 'We trusted that this had been He who should have redeemed Israel'—but now we trust no more, and our dreams are buried in His grave? Why did they not go back to Galilee and their nets? What raised their spirits, their courage, and increased their understanding of Him, and their faith in Him? How came His death to be the occasion of consolidating, not of shattering, their fellowship? How came Peter to be so sure that a man who had died was the 'Prince of Life'? The answer, the only one psychologically

possible, is in what Peter here proclaims to unwilling ears, 'Whom God raised from the dead.'

The fact of the Resurrection sets the fact of the Death in another light. Meditating on these twin facts, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, we hear Himself speaking as He did to John in Patmos: 'I am the Living One who became dead, and lo, I am alive for evermore!'

If we try to listen with the ears of these first hearers of Peter's words, we shall better appreciate his daring paradox. Think of the tremendous audacity of the claim which they make, that Jesus should be the 'Prince of Life,' and of the strange contradiction to it which the fact that they 'killed' Him seems to give. How could death have power over the Prince of Life? That sounds as if, indeed, the 'sun were turned into darkness,' or as if fire became ice. That brief clause 'ye killed the Prince of Life' must have seemed sheer absurdity to the hearers whose hands were still red with the blood of Jesus.

But there is another paradox here. It was strange that death should be able to invade that Life, but it is no less strange that men should be able to inflict it. But we must not forget that Jesus died, not because men slew Him, but because He willed to die. The whole of the narratives of the Crucifixion in the Gospels avoid using the word 'death.' Such expressions as He 'gave up the ghost,' or the like, are used, implying what is elsewhere distinctly asserted, that His death was His offering of Himself, the result of His own volition, not of exhaustion or of torture. Thus, even in dying, He showed Himself the Lord of Life and the Master of Death. Men indeed fastened Jesus to the Cross, but He died, not because He was so

fastened, but because He willed to 'make His soul an offering for sin.' Bound as it were to a rock in the midst of the ocean, He, of His own will, and at His own time, bowed His head, and let the waves of the sea of death roll over it.

III. The triumphant divine paradox of life given and death conquered through a death.

Jesus is 'Prince' in the sense of being source of life to mankind, just because He died. His death is the death of Death. His apparent defeat is His real victory.

By His death He takes away our sins.

By His death He abolishes death.

The physical fact remains, but all else which makes the 'sting of death' to men is gone. It is no more a solitude, for He has died, and thereby He becomes a companion in that hour to every lover of His. Its darkness changes into light to those who, by 'following Him,' have, even there, 'the light of life.' This Samson carried away the gates of the prison on His own strong shoulders when He came forth from it. It is His to say, 'O death! I will be thy plague.'

By His death He diffuses life.

'The Spirit was not given' till Jesus was 'glorified,' which glorification is John's profound synonym for His crucifixion. When the alabaster box of His pure body was broken, the whole house of humanity was filled with the odour of the ointment.

So the great paradox becomes a blessed truth, that man's deepest sin works out God's highest act of Love and Pardon.

THE HEALING POWER OF THE NAME

'And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.'—ACTS iii. 16.

PETER said, 'Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?' eagerly disclaiming being anything else than a medium through which Another's power operated. Jesus Christ said, 'That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk'—unmistakably claiming to be a great deal more than a medium. Why the difference? Jesus Christ did habitually in His miracles adopt the tone on which Moses once ventured when he smote the rock and said, 'Ye rebels! must we bring the water for you?' and he was punished for it by exclusion from the Promised Land. Why the difference? Moses was 'in all his house as a servant, but Christ as a Son over His own house'; and what was arrogance in the servant was natural and reasonable in the Son.

The gist of this verse is a reference to Jesus Christ as a source of miraculous power, not merely because He wrought miracles when on earth, but because from heaven He gave the power of which Peter was but the channel. Now it seems to me that in these emphatic and singularly reduplicated words of the Apostle there are two or three very important lessons which I offer for your consideration.

I. The first is the power of the Name.

Now the Name of which Peter is speaking is not the collocation of syllables which are sounded 'Jesus

Christ.' His hearers were familiar with the ancient and Eastern method of regarding names as very much more than distinguishing labels. They are, in the view of the Old Testament, attempts at a summary description of things by their prominent characteristics. They are condensed definitions. And so the Old Testament uses the expression, the 'Name' of God, as equivalent to 'that which God is manifested to be.' Hence, in later days—and there are some tendencies thither even in Scripture—in Jewish literature 'the Name' came to be a reverential synonym for God Himself. And there are traces that this peculiar usage with regard to the divine Name was beginning to shape itself in the Church with reference to the name of Jesus, even at that period in which my text was spoken. For instance, in the fifth chapter we read that the Apostles 'departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name,' and we find at a much later date that missionaries of the Gospel are described by the Apostle John as going forth 'for the sake of the Name.'

The name of Christ, then, is the representation or embodiment of that which Christ is declared to be for us men, and it is that Name, the totality of what He is manifested to be, in which lies all power for healing and for strengthening. The Name, that is, the whole Christ, in His nature, His offices, His work, His Incarnation, His Life, His Death, Resurrection, Session at the right hand of God—it is this Christ whose Name made that man strong, and will make us strong. Brethren, let us remember that, while fragments of the Name will have fragmentary power, as the curative virtue that resides in any substance belongs to the smallest grain of it, if detached from the mass—whilst fragments of

the Name of Christ have power, thanks be to Him! so that no man can have even a very imperfect and rudimentary view of what Jesus Christ is and does, without getting strength and healing in proportion to the completeness of his conception, yet in order to realise all that He can be and do, a man must take the whole Christ as He is revealed.

The Early Church had a symbol for Jesus Christ, a fish, to which they were led because the Greek word for a fish is made up of the initials of the words which they conceived to be the Name. And what was it? '*Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour*'; *Jesus*, humanity; *Christ*, the apex of Revelation, the fulfilment of prophecy, the Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; *Son of God*, the divine nature: and all these, the humanity, the Messiahship, the divinity, found their sphere of activity in the last name, which, without them, would in its fulness have been impossible—*Saviour*. He is not such a Saviour as He may be to each of us, unless our conception of the Name grasps these three truths: His humanity, His Messiahship, His divinity. 'His Name has made this man strong.'

II. Notice how the power of the Name comes to operate.

Now, if you will observe the language of my text, you will note that Peter says, as it would appear, the same thing twice over: 'His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong.' And then, as if he were saying something else, he adds what seems to be the same thing: 'Yea! the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness.'

Now, note that in the first of these two statements nothing appears except the 'man,' the 'Name,' and

‘faith.’ I take it, though of course it may be questionable, that that clause refers to the man’s faith, and that we have in it the intentional exclusion of the human workers, and are presented with the only two parties really concerned—at the one end the Name, at the other end ‘this man made strong.’ And the link of connection between the two in this clause is faith—that is, the man’s trust. But then, if we come to the next clause, we find that although Peter has just previously disclaimed all merit in the cure, yet there is a sense in which some one’s faith, working as from without, *gave* to the man ‘this perfect soundness.’ And it seems very natural to me to understand that here, where human faith is represented as being, in some subordinate sense, the bestower of the healing which really the Name had bestowed, it is the faith of the human miracle-worker or medium which is referred to. Peter’s faith did give, but Peter only gave what he had received through faith. And so let all the praise be given to the water, and none to the cup.

Whether that be a fair interpretation of the words of my text, with their singular and apparently meaningless tautology or no, at all events the principle which is involved in the explanation is one that I wish to dwell upon briefly now; and that is, that in order for the Name, charged and supercharged with healing and strengthening power as it is, to come into operation, there must be a twofold trust.

The healer, the medium of healing, must have faith in the Name. Yes! of course. In all regions the first requisite, the one indispensable condition, of a successful propagandist, is enthusiastic confidence in what he promulgates. ‘That man will go far,’ said a cynical politician about one of his rivals; ‘he believes every

word he says.' And that is the condition always of getting other people to believe us. Faith is contagious; men catch from other people's tongues the accent of conviction. If one wants to enforce any opinion upon others, the first condition is that he shall be utterly self-oblivious; and when he is manifestly saying, as the Apostles in this context did, 'Do not fix your eyes on us, as though we were doing anything,' then hearts will bow before him, as the trees of the wood are bowed by the wind.

If that is true in all regions, it is eminently true in regard to religion. For what we need there most is not to be instructed, but to be impressed. Most of us have, lying dormant in the bedchamber and infirmary of our brains, convictions which only need to be awakened to revolutionise our lives. Now one of the most powerful ways of waking them is contact with any man in whom they are awake. So all successful teachers and messengers of Jesus Christ have had this characteristic in common, however unlike each other they have been. The divergences of temperament, of moods, of point of view, of method of working which prevailed even in the little group of Apostles, and broadly distinguished Paul from Peter, Peter from James, and Paul and Peter and James from John, are only types of what has been repeated ever since. Get together the great missionaries of the Cross, and you would have the most extraordinary collection of miscellaneous idiosyncrasies that the world ever saw, and they would not understand each other, as some of them wofully misunderstood each other when here together. But there was one characteristic in them all, a flaming earnestness of belief in the power of the Name. And so it did not matter much, if at all, what

their divergences were. Each of them was fitted for the Master's use.

And so, brethren, here is the reason—I do not say the only reason, but the main one, and that which most affects us—for the slow progress, and even apparent failure, of Christianity. It has fallen into the hands of a Church that does not half believe its own Gospel. By reason of formality and ceremonial and sacerdotalism and a lazy kind of expectation that, somehow or other, the benefits of Christ's love can come to men apart from their own personal faith in Him, the Church has largely ceased to anticipate that great things can be done by its utterance of the Name. And if you have, I do not say ministers, or teachers, or official proclaimers, or Sunday-school teachers, or the like, but I say if you have a *Church*, that is honey-combed with doubt, and from which the strength and flood-tide of faith have in many cases ebbed away, why, it may go on uttering its formal proclamations of the Name till the Day of Judgment, and all that will come of it will be—'The man in whom the devils were, leaped upon them, and overcame them, and said'—as he had a good right to say—'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' You cannot kindle a fire with snowballs. If the town crier goes into a quiet corner of the marketplace and rings his bell apologetically, and gives out his message in a whisper, it is small wonder if nobody listens. And that is the way in which too many so-called Christian teachers and communities hold forth the Name, as if begging pardon of the world for being so narrow and old-fashioned as to believe in it still.

And no less necessary is faith on the other side. The recipient must exercise trust. This lame man, no doubt, like the other that Paul looked at in a similar

case, had faith to be healed. That was the length of his tether. He believed that he was going to have his legs made strong, and they were made strong accordingly. If he had believed more, he would have got more. Let us hope that he did get more, because he believed more, at a later day. But in the meantime the Apostles' faith was not enough to cure him; and it is not enough for you that Jesus Christ should be standing with all His power at your elbow, and that, earnestly and enthusiastically, some of Christ's messengers may press upon you the acceptance of Him as a Saviour. He is of no good in the world to you, and never will be, unless you have the personal faith that knits you to Him.

It cannot be otherwise. Depend upon it, if Jesus Christ could save every one without terms and conditions at all, He would be only too glad to do it. But it cannot be done. The nature of His work, and the sort of blessings that He brings by His work, are such as that it is an impossibility that any man should receive them unless he has that trust which, beginning with the acceptance by the understanding of Christ as Saviour, passes on to the assent of the will, and the outgoing of the heart, and the yielding of the whole nature to Him. How can a truth do any good to any one who does not believe in it? How is it possible that, if you do not take a medicine, it will work? How can you expect to see, unless you open your eyes? How do you propose to have your blood purified, if you do not fill your lungs with air? Is it of any use to have gas-fittings in your house, if they are not connected with the main? Will a water tap run in your sculleries, if there is no pipe that joins it with the source of supply? My dear friend, these rough illus-

trations are only approximations to the absolute impossibility that Christ can help, heal, or save any man without the man's personal faith. 'Whosoever believeth' is no arbitrary limitation, but is inseparable from the very nature of the salvation given.

III. And now, lastly, note the effects of the power of the Name.

The Apostle puts in two separate clauses what, in the case in hand, was really one thing—'hath made this man strong;' and 'hath given him perfect soundness.' Ah! we can part the two, cannot we? There is the disease, the disease of an alienated heart, of a perverted will, of a swollen self, all of which we need to have cured and checked before we can do right. And there is weakness, the impotence to do what is good, 'how to perform I find not,' and we need to be strengthened as well as cured. There is only one thing that will do these two, and that is that Christ's power, ay, and Christ's own life, should pass, as it will pass if we trust Him, into our foulness and precipitate all the impurity—into our weakness and infuse strength. 'A reed shaken with the wind,' and without substance or solidity to resist, may be placed in what is called a petrifying well, and, by the infiltration of stony substance into its structure, may be turned into a rigid mass, like a little bar of iron. So, if Christ comes into my poor, weak, tremulous nature, there will be an infiltration into the very substance of my being of a present power which will make me strong.

My brother, you and I need, first and foremost, the healing, and then the strength-giving power, which we never find in its completeness anywhere but in Christ, and which we shall always find in Him.

And now notice, Jesus Christ does not make half

cures—‘this *perfect* soundness.’ If any man, in contact with Him, is but half delivered from his infirmities and purged from his sins, it is not because Christ’s power is inadequate, but because his own faith is defective.

Christ’s cures should be visible to all around. A man’s own testimony is not the most satisfactory. Peter appeals to the bystanders. ‘You have seen him lying here for years, a motionless lump of mendicancy, at the Temple gate. Now you see him walking and leaping and praising God. Is it a cure, or is it not?’ You professing Christians, would you like to stand that test, to empanel a jury of people that have no sympathy with your religion, in order that they might decide whether you were healed and strengthened or not? It is a good thing for us when the world bears witness that Jesus Christ’s power has come into us, and made us what we are.

And so, dear friends, I lay all these thoughts on your hearts. Christ’s gift is amply sufficient to deliver us from all evils of weakness, sickness, incapacity: to endue us with all gifts of spiritual and immortal strength. But, while the limit of what Christ gives is His boundless wealth, the limit of what you possess is your faith. The rainfall comes down in the same copiousness on rock and furrow, but it runs off the one, having stimulated no growth and left no blessing, and it sinks into the other and quickens every dormant germ into life which will one day blossom into beauty. We are all of us either rock or soil, and which we are depends on the reality, the firmness, and the force of our faith in Christ. He Himself has laid down the principle on which He bestows His gifts when He says, ‘According to thy faith be it unto thee!’

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

‘Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.’—Acts iii. 26.

So ended Peter's bold address to the wondering crowd gathered in the Temple courts around him, with his companion John and the lame man whom they had healed. A glance at his words will show how extraordinarily outspoken and courageous they are. He charges home on his hearers the guilt of Christ's death, unfalteringly proclaims His Messiahship, bears witness to His Resurrection and Ascension, asserts that He is the End and Fulfilment of ancient revelation, and offers to all the great blessings that Christ brings. And this fiery, tender oration came from the same lips which, a few weeks before, had been blanched with fear before a flippant maidservant, and had quivered as they swore, ‘I know not the man!’

One or two simple observations may be made by way of introduction. ‘Unto you *first*’—‘first’ implies second; and so the Apostle has shaken himself clear of the Jews' narrow belief that Messiah belonged to them only, and is already beginning to contemplate the possibility of a transference of the kingdom of God to the outlying Gentiles. ‘God having raised up His Son’—that expression has no reference, as it might at first seem, to the fact of the Resurrection; but is employed in the same sense as, and indeed looks back to, previous words. For he had just quoted Moses' declaration, ‘A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from your brethren.’ So it is Christ's equipment and appointment for His office, and not His Resurrection, which is spoken about here. ‘His

Son Jesus'—the Revised Version more accurately translates 'His Servant Jesus.' I shall have a word or two to say about that translation presently, but in the meantime I simply note the fact.

With this slight explanation let us now turn to two or three of the aspects of the words before us.

I. First, I note the extraordinary transformation which they indicate in the speaker.

I have already referred to his cowardice a very short time before. That transformation from a coward to a hero he shared in common with his brethren. On one page we read, 'They all forsook Him and fled.' We turn over half a dozen leaves and we read: 'They departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.' What did that?

Then there is another transformation no less swift, sudden, and inexplicable, except on one hypothesis. All through Christ's life the disciples had been singularly slow to apprehend the highest aspects of His teachings, and they had clung with a strange obstinacy to their narrow Pharisaic and Jewish notions of the Messiah as coming to establish a temporal dominion, in which Israel was to ride upon the necks of the subject nations. And now, all at once, this Apostle, and his fellows with him, have stepped from these puerile and narrow ideas out into this large place, that he and they recognise that the Jew had no exclusive possession of Messiah's blessings, and that these blessings consisted in no external kingdom, but lay mainly and primarily in His 'turning every one of you from your iniquities.' At one time the Apostles stood upon a gross, low, carnal level, and in a few weeks they were, at all events, feeling their way to, and to a large extent

had possession of, the most spiritual and lofty aspects of Christ's mission. What did that?

Something had come in between which wrought more, in a short space, than all the three years of Christ's teaching and companionship had done for them. What was it? Why did they not continue in the mood which two of them are reported to have been in, after the Crucifixion, when they said—'It is all up! we trusted that this had been He,' but the force of circumstances has shivered the confidence into fragments, and there is no such hope left for us any longer. What brought them out of that Slough of Despond?

I would put it to any fair-minded man whether the psychological facts of this sudden maturing of these childish minds, and their sudden change from slinking cowards into heroes who did not blanch before the torture and the scaffold, are accountable, if you strike out the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Pentecost? It seems to me that, for the sake of avoiding a miracle, the disbelievers in the Resurrection accept an impossibility, and tie themselves to an intellectual absurdity. And I for one would rather believe in a miracle than believe in an uncaused change, in which the Apostles take exactly the opposite course from that which they necessarily must have taken, if there had not been the facts that the New Testament asserts that there were, Christ's rising again from the dead, and Ascension.

Why did not the Church share the fate of John's disciples, who scattered like sheep without a shepherd when Herod chopped off their master's head? Why did not the Church share the fate of that abortive rising, of which we know that when Theudas, its leader, was slain, 'all, as many as believed on him, came to nought.' Why did these men act in exactly

the opposite way? I take it that, as you cannot account for Christ except on the hypothesis that He is the Son of the Highest, you cannot account for the continuance of the Christian Church for a week after the Crucifixion, except on the hypothesis that the men who composed it were witnesses of His Resurrection, and saw Him floating upwards and received into the Shechinah cloud and lost to their sight. Peter's change, witnessed by the words of my text—these bold and clear-sighted words—seems to me to be a perfect monstrosity, and incapable of explication, unless he saw the risen Lord, beheld the ascended Christ, was touched with the fiery Spirit descending on Pentecost, and so 'out of weakness was made strong,' and from a babe sprang to the stature of a man in Christ.

II. Look at these words as setting forth a remarkable view of Christ.

I have already referred to the fact that the word rendered 'son' ought rather to be rendered 'servant.' It literally means 'child' or 'boy,' and appears to have been used familiarly, just in the same fashion as we use the same expression 'boy,' or its equivalent 'maid,' as a more gentle designation for a servant. Thus the kindly centurion, when he would bespeak our Lord's care for his menial, calls him his 'boy'; and our Bible there translates rightly 'servant.'

Again, the designation is that which is continually employed in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as the equivalent for the well-known prophetic phrase 'the Servant of Jehovah,' which, as you will remember, is characteristic of the second portion of the prophecies of Isaiah. And consequently we find that, in a quotation of Isaiah's prophecy in the Gospel of Matthew, the very phrase of our text is there employed: 'Behold My Servant whom I uphold!'

Now, it seems as if this designation of our Lord as God's Servan^t was very familiar to Peter's thoughts at this stage of the development of Christian doctrine. For we find the name employed twice in this discourse—in the thirteenth verse, 'the God of our Fathers hath glorified His Servant Jesus,' and again in my text. We also find it twice in the next chapter, where Peter, offering up a prayer amongst his brethren, speaks of 'Thy Holy Child Jesus,' and prays 'that signs and wonders may be done through the name' of that 'Holy Child.' So, then, I think we may fairly take it that, at the time in question, this thought of Jesus as the 'Servant of the Lord' had come with especial force to the primitive Church. And the fact that the designation never occurs again in the New Testament seems to show that they passed on from it into a deeper perception than even it attests of who and what this Jesus was in relation to God.

But, at all events, we have in our text the Apostle looking back to that dim, mysterious Figure which rises up with shadowy lineaments out of the great prophecy of 'Isaiah,' and thrilling with awe and wonder, as he sees, bit by bit, in the Face painted on the prophetic canvas, the likeness of the Face into which he had looked for three blessed years, that now began to tell him more than they had done whilst their moments were passing.

'The Servant of the Lord'—that means, first of all, that Christ, in all which He does, meekly and obediently executes the Father's will. As He Himself said, 'I come not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.' But it carries us further than that, to a point about which I would like to say one word now; and that is, the clear recognition that the very centre

of Jewish prophecy is the revelation of the personality of the Christ. Now, it seems to me that present tendencies, discussions about the nature and limits of inspiration, investigations which, in many directions, are to be welcomed and are fruitful as to the manner of origin of the books of the Old Testament, and as to their collection into a Canon and a whole—that all this new light has a counterbalancing disadvantage, in that it tends somewhat to obscure in men's minds the great central truth about the revelation of God in Israel—viz. that it was all progressive, and that its goal and end was Jesus Christ. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,' and however much we may have to learn—and I have no doubt that we have a great deal to learn, about the composition, the structure, the authorship, the date of these ancient books—I take leave to say that the unlearned reader, who recognises that they all converge on Jesus Christ, has hold of the clue of the labyrinth, and has come nearer to the marrow of the books than the most learned investigators, who see all manner of things besides in them, and do not see that 'they that went before cried, saying, Hosanna! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!'

And so I venture to commend to you, brethren—not as a barrier against any reverent investigation, not as stopping any careful study—this as the central truth concerning the ancient revelation, that it had, for its chief business, to proclaim the coming of the Servant of Jehovah, Jesus the Christ.

III. And now, lastly, look at these words as setting forth the true centre of Christ's work.

'He has sent Him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' I have already

spoken about the gross, narrow, carnal apprehensions of Messiah's work which cleaved to the disciples during all our Lord's life here, and which disturbed even the sanctity of the upper chamber at that last meal, with squabbles about precedence which had an eye to places in the court of the Messiah when He assumed His throne. But here Peter has shaken himself clear of all these, and has grasped the thought that, whatever derivative and secondary blessings of an external and visible sort may, and must, come in Messiah's train, *the blessing which He brings is of a purely spiritual and inward character, and consists in turning away single souls from their love and practice of evil. That is Christ's true work.*

The Apostle does not enlarge as to how it is done. We know how it is done. Jesus turns away men from sin because, by the magnetism of His love, and the attractive raying out of influence from His Cross, He turns them to Himself. He turns us from our iniquities by the expulsive power of a new affection, which, coming into our hearts like a great river into some foul Augean stable, sweeps out on its waters all the filth that no broom can ever clear out in detail. He turns men from their iniquities by His gift of a new life, kindred with that from which it is derived.

There is an old superstition that lightning turned whatever it struck towards the point from which the flash came, so that a tree with its thousand leaves had each of them pointed to that quarter in the heavens where the blaze had been.

And so Christ, when He flings out the beneficent flash that slays only our evil, and vitalises ourselves, turns us to Him, and away from our transgressions. 'Turn us, O Christ, and we shall be turned.'

Ah, brethren! that is the blessing that we need most, for 'iniquities' are universal; and so long as man is bound to his sin it will embitter all sweetnesses, and neutralise every blessing. It is not culture, valuable as that is in many ways, that will avail to stanch man's deepest wounds. It is not a new social order that will still the discontent and the misery of humanity. You may adopt collective economic and social arrangements, and divide property out as it pleases you. But as long as man continues selfish he will continue sinful, and as long as he continues sinful *any* social order will be pregnant with sorrow, 'and when it is finished it will bring forth death.' You have to go deeper down than all that, down as deep as this Apostle goes in this sermon of his, and recognise that Christ's prime blessing is the turning of men from their iniquities, and that only after that has been done will other good come.

How shallow, by the side of that conception, do modern notions of Jesus as the great social Reformer look! These are true, but they want their basis, and their basis lies only here, that He is the Redeemer of individuals from their sins. There were people in Christ's lifetime who were all untouched by His teachings, but when they found that He gave bread miraculously they said, 'This is of a truth the Prophet! That's the prophet for my money; the Man that can make bread, and secure material well-being.' Have not certain modern views of Christ's work and mission a good deal in common with these vulgar old Jews—views which regard Him mainly as contributing to the material good, the social and economical well-being of the world?

Now, I believe that He does that. And I believe that

Christ's principles are going to revolutionise society as it exists at present. But I am sure that we are on a false scent if we attempt to preach consequences without proclaiming their antecedents, and that such preaching will end, as all such attempts have ended, in confusion and disappointment.

They used to talk about Jesus Christ, in the first French Revolution, as 'the Good *Sansculotte*.' Perfectly true! But as the basis of that, and of all representations of Him, that will have power on the diseases of the community, we have to preach Him as the Saviour of the individual from his sin.

And so, brethren, has He saved you? Do you begin your notions of Jesus Christ where His work begins? Do you feel that what you want most is neither culture nor any superficial and external changes, but something that will deal with the deep, indwelling, rooted, obstinate self-regard which is the centre of all sin? And have you gone alone to Him as a sinful man? As the Apostle here suggests, Jesus Christ does not save communities. The doctor has his patients into the consulting-room one by one. There is no applying of Christ's benefits to men in batches, by platoons and regiments, as Clovis baptized his Franks; but you have to go, every one of you, through the turnstile singly, and alone to confess, and alone to be absolved, and alone to be turned, from your iniquity.

If I might venture to alter the position of words in my text, I would lay them, so modified, on the hearts of all my friends whom my words may reach now, and say, 'Unto you—unto *thee*, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, *first* in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.'

THE FIRST BLAST OF TEMPEST

'And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now even-tide. 4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. 5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6. And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? 8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. 13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.'—Acts iv. 1-14.

HITHERTO the Jewish authorities had let the disciples alone, either because their attention had not been drawn even by Pentecost and the consequent growth of the Church, or because they thought that to ignore the new sect was the best way to end it. But when its leaders took to vehement preaching in Solomon's porch, and crowds eagerly listened, it was time to strike in.

Our passage describes the first collision of hostile authority with Christian faith, and shows, as in a glass, the constant result of that collision in all ages.

The motives actuating the assailants are significantly analysed, and may be distributed among the three classes enumerated. The priests and the captain of the Temple would be annoyed by the very fact that Peter and John taught the people: the former, because they were jealous of their official prerogative: the latter, because he was responsible for public order, and

a riot in the Temple court would have been a scandal. The Sadducees were indignant at the substance of the teaching, which affirmed the resurrection of the dead, which they denied, and alleged it as having occurred 'in Jesus.'

The position of Sadducees and Pharisees is inverted in Acts as compared with the Gospels. While Christ lived, the Pharisees were the soul of the opposition to Him, and His most solemn warnings fell on them; after the Resurrection, the Sadducees head the opposition, and among the Pharisees are some, like Gamaliel and afterwards Paul, who incline to the new faith. It was the Resurrection that made the difference, and the difference is an incidental testimony to the fact that Christ's Resurrection was proclaimed from the first. To ask whether Jesus had risen, and to examine the evidence, were the last things of which the combined assailants thought. This public activity of the Apostles threatened their influence or their pet beliefs, and so, like persecutors in all ages, they shut their eyes to the important question, 'Is this preaching true or false?' and took the easier course of laying hands on the preachers.

So the night fell on Peter and John in prison, the first of the thousands who have suffered bonds and imprisonment for Christ, and have therein found liberty. What lofty faith, and what subordination of the fate of the messengers to the progress of the message, are expressed in that abrupt introduction, in verse 4, of the statistics of the increase of the Church from that day's work! It mattered little that it ended with the two Apostles in custody, since it ended too with five thousand rejoicing in Christ.

The arrest seems to have been due to a sudden

thought on the part of the priests, captain, and Sadducees, without commands from the Sanhedrin or the high priest. But when these inferior authorities had got hold of their prisoners, they probably did not quite know what to do with them, and so moved the proper persons to summon the Sanhedrin. In all haste, then, a session was called for next morning. 'Rulers, elders, and scribes' made up the constituent members of the court, and the same two 'high priests' who had tried Jesus are there, attended by a strong contingent of dependants, who could be trusted to vote as they were bidden. Annas was an *emeritus* high priest, whose age and relationship to Caiaphas, the actual holder of the post and Annas's son-in-law, gave him an influential position. He retained the title, though he had ceased to hold the office, as a cleric without a charge is usually called 'Reverend.'

It was substantially the same court which had condemned Jesus, and probably now sat in the same hall as then. So that Peter and John would remember the last time when they had together been in that room, and Who had stood in the criminal's place where they now were set.

The court seems to have been somewhat at a loss how to proceed. The Apostles had been arrested for their words, but they are questioned about the miracle. It was no crime to teach in the Temple, but a crime might be twisted out of working a miracle in the name of any but Jehovah. To do that would come near blasphemy or worshipping strange gods. The Sanhedrin knew what the answer to their question would be, and probably they intended, as soon as the anticipated answer was given, to 'rend their clothes,' and say, as they had done once before, 'What need we further witnesses?

They have spoken blasphemy.' But things did not go as was expected. The crafty question was put. It does not attempt to throw doubt on the reality of the miracle, but there is a world of arrogant contempt in it, both in speaking of the cure as 'this,' and in the scornful emphasis with which, in the Greek, 'ye' stands last in the sentence, and implies, 'ye poor, ignorant fishermen.'

The last time that Peter had been in the judgment-hall his courage had oozed out of him at the prick of a maid-servant's sharp tongue, but now he fronts all the ecclesiastical authorities without a tremor. Whence came the transformation of the cowardly denier into the heroic confessor, who turns the tables on his judges and accuses them? The narrative answers. He was 'filled with the Holy Ghost.' That abiding possession of the Spirit, begun on Pentecost, did not prevent special inspiration for special needs, and the Greek indicates that there was granted such a temporary influx in this critical hour.

One cannot but note the calmness of the Apostle, so unlike his old tumultuous self. He begins with acknowledging the lawful authority of the court, and goes on, with just a tinge of sarcasm, to put the vague 'this' of the question in its true light. It was 'a good deed done to an impotent man,' for which John and he stood there. Singular sort of crime that! Was there not a presumption that the power which had wrought so 'good' a deed was good? 'Do men gather grapes of thorns?' Many a time since then Christianity has been treated as criminal, because of its beneficence to bodies and souls.

But Peter rises to the full height of the occasion, when he answers the Sanhedrin's question with the

pealing forth of his Lord's name. He repeats in substance his former contrast of Israel's treatment of Jesus and God's; but, in speaking to the rulers, his tone is more severe than it was to the people. The latter had been charged, at Pentecost and in the Temple, with crucifying *Jesus*; the former are here charged with crucifying the *Christ*. It was their business to have tested his claims, and to have welcomed the Messiah. The guilt was shared by both, but the heavier part lay on the shoulders of the Sanhedrin.

Mark, too, the bold proclamation of the Resurrection, the stone of offence to the Sadducees. How easy it would have been for them to silence the Apostle, if they could have pointed to the undisturbed and occupied grave! That would have finished the new sect at once. Is there any reason why it was not done but the one reason that it could not be done?

Thus far Peter has been answering the interrogation legally put, and has done as was anticipated. Now was the time for Annas and the rest to strike in; but they could not carry out their programme, for the fiery stream of Peter's words does not stop when they expected, and instead of a timid answer followed by silence, they get an almost defiant proclamation of the Name, followed by a charge against them, which turns the accused into the accuser, and puts them at the bar. Peter learned to apply the passage in the Psalm (v. 11) to the rulers, from his Master's use of it (Matt. xxi. 42); and there is no quaver in his voice nor fear in his heart when, in the face of all these learned Rabbis and high and mighty dignitaries, he brands them as foolish builders, blind to the worth of the Stone 'chosen of God, and precious,' and tells them that the course of divine Providence will run counter to their rejection

of Jesus, and make him the very 'Head of the corner,'—the crown, as well as the foundation, of God's building.

But not even this bold indictment ends the stream of his speech. The proclamation of the power of the Name was fitly followed by pressing home the guilt and madness of rejecting Jesus, and that again by the glad tidings of salvation for all, even the rejecters. Is not the sequence in Peter's defence substantially that which all Christian preaching should exhibit? First, strong, plain proclamation of the truth; then pungent pressing home of the sin of turning away from Jesus; and then earnest setting forth of the salvation in His name,—a salvation wide as the world, and deep as our misery and need, but narrow, inasmuch as it is 'in none other.' The Apostle will not end with charging his hearers with guilt, but with offering them salvation. He will end with lifting up 'the Name' high above all other, and setting it in solitary clearness before, not these rulers only, but the whole world. The salvation which it had wrought on the lame man was but a parable and picture of the salvation from all ills of body and spirit, which was stored in that Name, and in it alone.

The rulers' contempt had been expressed by their emphatic ending of their question with that 'ye.' Peter expresses his brotherhood and longing for the good of his judges by ending his impassioned, or, rather, inspired address with a loving, pleading 'we.' He puts himself on the same level with them as needing salvation, and would fain have them on the same level with himself and John as receiving it. That is the right way to preach.

Little need be said as to the effect of this address.

Whether it went any deeper in any susceptible souls or not, it upset the schemes of the leaders. Something in the manner and matter of it awed them into wonder, and paralysed them for the time. Here was the first instance of the fulfilment of that promise, which has been fulfilled again and again since, of 'a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.' 'Unlearned,' as ignorant of Rabbinical traditions, and 'ignorant,' or, rather, 'private,' as holding no official position, these two wielded a power over hearts and consciences which not even official indifference and arrogance could shake off. Thank God, that day's experience is repeated still, and any of us may have the same Spirit to clothe us with the same armour of light!

The Sanhedrin knew well enough that the Apostles had been with Jesus, and the statement that 'they took knowledge of them' cannot mean that that fact dawned on the rulers for the first time. Rather it means that their wonder at the 'boldness' of the two drove home the fact of their association with Him to their minds. That association explained the marvel; for the Sanhedrin remembered how He had stood, meek but unawed, at the same bar. They said to themselves, 'We know where these men get this brave freedom of speech,—from that Nazarene.' Happy shall we be if our demeanour recalls to spectators the ways of our Lord!

How came the lame man there? He had not been arrested with the Apostles. Had he voluntarily and bravely joined them? We do not know, but evidently he was not there as accused, and probably had come as a witness of the reality of the miracle. Notice the emphatic 'standing,' as in verse 10,—a thing that he

had never done all his life. No wonder that the Sanhedrin were puzzled, and settled down to the 'lame and impotent conclusion' which follows. So, in the first round of the world-long battle between the persecutors and the persecuted, the victory is all on the side of the latter. So it has been ever since, though often the victors have died in the conflict. 'The Church is an anvil which has worn out many hammers,' and the story of the first collision is, in essentials, the story of all.

WITH AND LIKE CHRIST

'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'—ACTS iv. 13.

Two young Galilean fishermen, before the same formidable tribunal which a few weeks before had condemned their Master, might well have quailed. And evidently 'Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest,' were very much astonished that their united wisdom and dignity did not produce a greater impression on these two contumacious prisoners. They were 'unlearned,' knowing nothing about Rabbinical wisdom; they were 'ignorant,' or, as the word ought rather to be rendered, 'persons in a private station,' without any kind of official dignity. And yet there they stood, perfectly unembarrassed and at their ease, and said what they wanted to say, all of it, right out. So, as great astonishment crept over the dignified ecclesiastics who were sitting in judgment upon them, their astonishment led them to remember what, of course, they knew before, only that it had not

struck them so forcibly, as explaining the Apostles' demeanour—viz., 'that they had been with Jesus.' So they said to themselves: 'Ah, that explains it all! There is the root of it. The company that they have kept accounts for their unembarrassed boldness.'

Now, I need not notice by more than a word in passing, what a testimony it is to the impression that that meek and gracious Sufferer had made upon His judges, that when they saw these two men standing there unfaltering, they began to remember how that other Prisoner had stood. And perhaps some of them began to think that they had made a mistake in that last trial. It is a testimony to the impression that Christ had made that the strange demeanour of His two servants recalled the Master to the mind of the judges.

I. The first thing that strikes us here is the companionship that transforms.

The rulers were partly right, and they were partly wrong. The source from which these men had drawn their boldness was their being with Christ; but it was not such companionship with Christ, as Annas and Caiaphas had in view, that had given them courage. For as long as the Apostles had His personal presence with them, there was no perceptible transforming or elevating process going on in them; and it was not until after they had lost that corporeal presence that there came upon them the change which even the prejudiced eyes of these judges could not help seeing.

The writer of Acts gives a truer explanation with which we may fill out the incomplete explanation of the rulers, when he says, 'Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Ghost*, said unto them.' Ah, that is it! They had been with Jesus all the days that He went in and out

amongst them. They had companioned with Him, and they had gained but little from it. But when He went away, and they were relegated to the same kind of companionship with Him that you and I have or may have, then a change began to take place on them. And so the companionship that transforms is not what the Apostle calls 'knowing Christ after the flesh,' but inward communion with Him, the companionship and familiarity which are as possible for us as for any Peter or John of them all, and without which our Christianity is nothing but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

They were 'with Jesus,' as each of us may be. Their communion was in no respect different from the communion that is open and indispensable to any real Christian. To be with Him is possible for us all. When we go to our daily work, when we are compassed about by distracting and trivial cares, when men come buzzing round us, and the ordinary secularities of life seem to close in upon us like the walls of a prison, and to shut out the blue and the light—oh! it is hard, but it *is* possible, for every one of us to think these all away, and to carry with us into everything that blessed thought of a Presence that is not to be put aside, that sits beside me at my study table, that stands beside you at your tasks, that goes with you in shop and mart, that is always near, with its tender encircling, with its mighty protection, with its all-sufficing sweetness and power. To be with Christ is no prerogative, either of Apostles and teachers of the primitive age, or of saints that have passed into the higher vision; but it is possible for us all. No doubt there are as yet unknown forms and degrees of companionship with Christ in the future state, in com-

parison with which to be 'present in the body is to be absent from the Lord'; but in the inmost depth of reality, the soul that loves is where it loves, and has whom it loves ever with it. 'Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also,' and we may be with Christ if only we will honestly try hour by hour to keep ourselves in touch with Him, and to make Him the motive as well as the end of the work that other men do along with us, and do from altogether secular and low motives.

Another phase of being with Christ lies in frank, full, and familiar conversation with Him. I do not understand a dumb companionship. When we are with those that we love, and with whom we are at ease, speech comes instinctively. If we are co-denizens of the Father's house with the Elder Brother, we shall talk to Him. We shall not need to be reminded of the 'duty of prayer,' but shall rather instinctively and as a matter of course, without thinking of what we are doing, speak to Him our momentary wants, our passing discomforts, our little troubles. There may be a great deal more virtue in monosyllabic prayers than in long liturgies. Little jets of speech or even of unspoken speech that go up to Him are likely to be heart-felt and to be heard. It is said of Israel's army on one occasion, 'they cried unto God in the battle, and He was entreated of them.' Do you think that theirs would be very elaborate prayers? Was there any time to make a long petition when the sword of a Philistine was whizzing about the suppliant's ears? It was only a cry, but it *was* a cry; and so 'He was entreated of them.' If we are 'with Christ' we shall talk to Him; and if we are with Christ He will talk to us. It is for us to keep in the attitude

of listening and, so far as may be, to hush other voices, in order that His may be heard. If we do so, even here 'shall we ever be with the Lord.'

II. Now, note next the character that this companionship produces.

Annas and Caiaphas said to each other: 'Ah, these two have been with that Jesus! That is where they have got their boldness. They are like Him.'

As is the Master, so is the servant. That is the broad, general principle that lies in my text. To be with Christ makes men Christlike. A soul habitually in contact with Jesus will imbibe sweetness from Him, as garments laid away in a drawer with some preservative perfume absorb fragrance from that beside which they lie. Therefore the surest way for Christian people to become what God would have them to be, is to direct the greater part of their effort, not so much to the acquirement of individual characteristics and excellences, as to the keeping up of continuity of communion with the Master. Then the excellences will come. Astronomers, for instance, have found out that if they take a sensitive plate and lay it so as to receive the light from a star, and keep it in place by giving it a motion corresponding with the apparent motion of the heavens, for hours and hours, there will become visible upon it a photographic image of dim stars that no human eye or telescope can see. Persistent lying before the light stamps the image of the light upon the plate. Communion with Christ is the secret of Christlikeness. So instead of all the wearisome, painful, futile attempts at tinkering one's own character apart from Him, here is the royal road. Not that there is no effort in it. We must never forget nor undervalue the necessity for struggle in the

Christian life. But that truth needs to be supplemented with the thought that comes from my text—viz. that the fruitful direction in which the struggle is to be mainly made lies in keeping ourselves in touch with Jesus Christ, and if we do that, then transformation comes by beholding. ‘We all, reflecting as a mirror does, the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image.’ ‘They have been with Jesus,’ and so they were like Him.

But now look at the specific kinds of excellence which seem to have come out of this communion. ‘They beheld the *boldness* of Peter and John.’ The word that is translated ‘boldness’ no doubt conveys that idea, but it also conveys another. Literally it means ‘the act of saying everything.’ It means openness of unembarrassed speech, and so comes to have the secondary signification, which the text gives, of ‘boldness.’

Then, to be with Christ gives a living knowledge of Him and of truth, far in advance of the head knowledge of wise and learned people. It was a fact that these two knew nothing about what Rabbi *This*, or Rabbi *That*, or Rabbi *The Other* had said, and yet could speak, as they had been speaking, large religious ideas that astonished these hide-bound Pharisees, who thought that there was no way to get to the knowledge of the revelation of God made to Israel, except by the road of their own musty and profitless learning. Ay! and it always is so. An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theology. The men that have summered and wintered with Jesus Christ may not know a great many things that are supposed to be very important parts of religion, but they have got hold of the central truth of it, with a power, and in a fashion, that men of books, and ideas, and systems and creeds,

and theological learning, may know nothing about. 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, are called.' Let a poor man at his plough-tail, or a poor woman in her garret, or a collier in the pit, have Jesus Christ for their Companion, and they have got the kernel; and the gentlemen that like such diet may live on the shell if they will, and can. Religious ideas are of little use unless there be heart-experiences; and heart-experiences are wonderful teachers of religious truth.

Again, to be with Christ frees from the fear of man. It was a new thing for such persons as Peter and John to stand cool and unawed before the Council. Not so very long ago one of the two had been frightened into a momentary apostasy by dread of being haled before the rulers, and now they are calmly heroic, and threats are idle words to them. I need not point to the strong presumption, raised by the contrast of the Apostles' past cowardice and present courage, of the occurrence of some such extraordinary facts as the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Descent of the Spirit. Something had happened which revolutionised these men. It was their communion with Jesus, made more real and deep by the cessation of His bodily presence, which made these unlearned and non-official Galileans front the Council with calmly beating hearts and unfaltering tongues. Doubtless, temperament has much to do with courage, but, no doubt, he who lives near Jesus is set free from undue dependence on things seen and on persons. Perfect love casts out fear, not only of the Beloved, but of all creatures. It is the bravest thing in the world.

Further, to be with Christ will open a man's lips. The fountain, if it is full, must well up. 'Light is light

which circulates. Heat is heat which radiates.' The true possession of Jesus Christ will always make it impossible for the possessor to be dumb. I pray you to test yourselves, as I would that all professing Christians should test themselves, by that simple truth, that a full heart must find utterance. The instinct that drives a man to speak of the thing in which he is interested should have full play in the Christian life. It seems to me a terribly sad fact that there are such hosts of good, kind people, with some sort of religion about them, who never feel any anxiety to say a word to any soul concerning the Master whom they profess to love. I know, of course, that deep feeling is silent, and that the secrets of Christian experience are not to be worn on the sleeve for daws to peck at. And I know that the conventionalities of this generation frown very largely upon the frank utterance of religious convictions on the part of religious people, except on Sundays, in Sunday-schools, pulpits, and the like. But for all that, what is in you will come out. If you have never felt 'I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay,' I do not think that there is much sign in you of a very deep or a very real being with Jesus.

III. The last point to be noted is, the impression which such a character makes.

It was not so much what Peter and John said that astonished the Council, as the fact of their being composed and bold enough to say anything.

A great deal more is done by character than by anything else. Most people in the world take their notions of Christianity from its concrete embodiments in professing Christians. For one man that has read his Bible, and has come to know what religion is thereby, there are a hundred that look at you and me, and

therefrom draw their conclusions as to what religion is. It is not my sermons, but your life, that is the most important agency for the spread of the Gospel in this congregation. And if we, as Christian people, were to live so as to make men say, 'Dear me, that is strange. That is not the kind of thing that one would have expected from that man. That is of a higher strain than he is of. Where did it come from, I wonder?' 'Ah, he learned it of that Jesus'—if people were constrained to speak in that style to themselves about us, dear friends, and about all our brethren, England would be a different England from what it is to-day. It is Christians' lives, after all, that make dints in the world's conscience.

Do you remember one of the Apostle's lovely and strong metaphors? Paul says that that little Church in Thessalonica rung out clear and strong the name of Jesus Christ—resonant like the clang of a bugle, 'so that we need not to speak anything.' The word that he employs for 'sounded out' is a technical expression for the ringing blast of a trumpet. Very small penny whistles would be a better metaphor for the instruments which the bulk of professing Christians play on.

'Adorn the doctrine of Christ.' And that you may, listen to His own word, which says all I have been trying to say in this sermon: 'Abide in Me. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.'

OBEDIENT DISOBEDIENCE

'But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. 23. And being let go they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25. Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. 27. For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28. For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done. 29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, 30. By stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus. 31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.'—ACTS iv. 19-31.

THE only chance for persecution to succeed is to smite hard and swiftly. If you cannot strike, do not threaten. Menacing words only give courage. The rulers betrayed their hesitation when the end of their solemn conclave was but to 'straitly threaten'; and less heroic confessors than Peter and John would have disregarded the prohibition as mere wind. None the less the attitude of these two Galilean fishermen is noble and singular, when their previous cowardice is remembered. This first collision with civil authority gives, as has been already noticed, the main lines on which the relations of the Church to hostile powers have proceeded.

I. The heroic refusal of unlawful obedience. We shall probably not do injustice to John if we suppose that Peter was spokesman. If so, the contrast of the tone of his answer with all previously recorded utterances of his is remarkable. Warm-hearted impulsive—

ness, often wrong-headed and sometimes illogical, had been their mark; but here we have calm, fixed determination, which, as is usually its manner, wastes no words, but in its very brevity impresses the hearers as being immovable. Whence did this man get the power to lay down once for all the foundation principles of the limits of civil obedience, and of the duty of Christian confession? His words take rank with the ever-memorable sayings of thinkers and heroes, from Socrates in his prison telling the Athenians that he loved them, but that he must 'obey God rather than you,' to Luther at Worms with his 'It is neither safe nor right to do anything against conscience. Here I stand; I can do nothing else. God help me! Amen.' Peter's words are the first of a long series.

This first instance of persecution is made the occasion for the clear expression of the great principles which are to guide the Church. The answer falls into two parts, in the first of which the limits of obedience to civil authority are laid down in a perfectly general form to which even the Council are expected to assent, and in the second an irresistible compulsion to speak is boldly alleged as driving the two Apostles to a flat refusal to obey.

It was a daring stroke to appeal to the Council for an endorsement of the principle in verse 19, but the appeal was unanswerable; for this tribunal had no other ostensible reason for existence than to enforce obedience to the law of God, and to Peter's dilemma only one reply was possible. But it rested on a bold assumption, which was calculated to irritate the court; namely, that there was a blank contradiction between their commands and God's, so that to obey the one was to disobey the other. When that parting of the

ways is reached, there remains no doubt as to which road a religious man must take.

The limits of civil obedience are clearly drawn. It is a duty, because 'the powers that be are ordained of God,' and obedience to them is obedience to Him. But if they, transcending their sphere, claim obedience which can only be rendered by disobedience to Him who has appointed them, then they are no longer His ministers, and the duty of allegiance falls away. But there must be a plain conflict of commands, and we must take care lest we substitute whims and fancies of our own for the injunctions of God. Peter was not guided by his own conceptions of duty, but by the distinct precept of his Master, which had bid him speak. It is not true that it is the cause which makes the martyr, but it is true that many good men have made themselves martyrs needlessly. This principle is too sharp a weapon to be causelessly drawn and brandished. Only an unmistakable opposition of commandments warrants its use; and then, he has little right to be called Christ's soldier who keeps the sword in the scabbard.

The articulate refusal in verse 20 bases itself on the ground of irrepressible necessity: 'We cannot but speak.' The immediate application was to the facts of Christ's life, death, and glory. The Apostles could not help speaking of these, both because to do so was their commission, and because the knowledge of them and of their importance forbade silence. The truth implied is of wide reach. Whoever has a real, personal experience of Christ's saving power, and has heard and seen Him, will be irresistibly impelled to impart what he has received. Speech is a relief to a full heart. The word, concealed in the prophet's heart, burned

there 'like fire in his bones, and he was weary of forbearing.' So it always is with deep conviction. If a man has never felt that he must speak of Christ, he is a very imperfect Christian. The glow of his own heart, the pity for men who know Him not, his Lord's command, all concur to compel speech. The full river cannot be dammed up.

II. The lame and impotent conclusion of the perplexed Council. How plain the path is when only duty is taken as a guide, and how vigorously and decisively a man marches along it! Peter had no hesitation, and his resolved answer comes crashing in a straight course, like a cannon-ball. The Council had a much more ambiguous oracle to consult in order to settle their course, and they hesitate accordingly, and at last do a something which is a nothing. They wanted to trim their sails to catch popular favour, and so they could not do anything thoroughly. To punish or acquit was the only alternative for just judges. But they were not just; and as Jesus had been crucified, not because Pilate thought Him guilty, but to please the people, so His Apostles were let off, not because they were innocent, but for the same reason. When popularity-hunters get on the judicial bench, society must be rotten, and nearing its dissolution. To 'decree unrighteousness by a law' is among the most hideous of crimes. Judges 'willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,' are portents indicative of corruption. We may remark here how the physician's pen takes note of the patient's age, as making his cure more striking, and manifestly miraculous.

III. The Church's answer to the first assault of the world's power. How beautifully natural that is, 'Being let go, they went to their own,' and how large a prin-

ciple is expressed in the naïve words! The great law of association according to spiritual affinity has much to do in determining relations here. It aggregates men, according to sorts; but its operation is thwarted by other conditions, so that companionship is often misery. But a time comes when it will work unhindered, and men will be united with their like, as the stones on some sea-beaches are laid in rows, according to their size, by the force of the sea. Judas 'went to his own place,' and, in another world, like will draw to like, and prevailing tendencies will be increased by association with those who share them.

The prayer of the Church was probably the inspired outpouring of one voice, and all the people said 'Amen,' and so made it theirs. Whose voice it was which thus put into words the common sentiment we should gladly have known, but need not speculate. The great fact is that the Church answered threats by prayer. It augurs healthy spiritual life when opposition and danger neither make cheeks blanch with fear nor flush with anger. No man there trembled nor thought of vengeance, or of repaying threats with threats. Every man there instinctively turned heavenwards, and flung himself, as it were, into God's arms for protection. Prayer is the strongest weapon that a persecuted Church can use. Browning makes a tyrant say, recounting how he had tried to crush a man, that his intended victim

'Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed,
So I was afraid.'

The contents of the prayer are equally noteworthy. Instead of minutely studying it verse by verse, we may note some of its salient points. Observe its undaunted

courage. That company never quivered or wavered. They had no thought of obeying the mandate of the Council. They were a little army of heroes. What had made them so? What but the conviction that they had a living Lord at God's right hand, and a mighty Spirit in their spirits? The world has never seen a transformation like that. Unique effects demand unique causes for their explanation, and nothing but the historical truth of the facts recorded in the last pages of the Gospels and first of the Acts accounts for the demeanour of these men.

Their courage is strikingly marked by their petition. All they ask is 'boldness' to speak a word which shall not be theirs, but God's. Fear would have prayed for protection; passion would have asked retribution on enemies. Christian courage and devotion only ask that they may not shrink from their duty, and that the word may be spoken, whatever becomes of the speakers. The world is powerless against men like that. Would the Church of to-day meet threats with like unanimity of desire for boldness in confession? If not, it must be because it has not the same firm hold of the Risen Lord which these first believers had. The truest courage is that which is conscious of its weakness, and yet has no thought of flight, but prays for its own increase.

We may observe, too, the body of belief expressed in the prayer. First it lays hold on the creative omnipotence of God, and thence passes to the recognition of His written revelation. The Church has begun to learn the inmost meaning of the Old Testament, and to find Christ there. David may not have written the second Psalm. Its attribution to him by the Church stands on a different level from Christ's attribution of

authorship, as, for instance, of the hundred and tenth Psalm. The prophecy of the Psalm is plainly Messianic, however it may have had a historical occasion in some forgotten revolt against some Davidic king; and, while the particular incidents to which the prayer alludes do not exhaust its far-reaching application, they are rightly regarded as partly fulfilling it. Herod is a 'king of the earth,' Pilate is a 'ruler'; Roman soldiers are Gentiles; Jewish rulers are the representatives of 'the people.' Jesus is 'God's Anointed.' The fact that such an unnatural and daring combination of rebels was predicted in the Psalm bears witness that even that crime at Calvary was foreordained to come to pass, and that God's hand and counsel ruled. Therefore all other opposition, such as now threatened, will turn out to be swayed by that same Mighty Hand, to work out His counsel. Why, then, should the Church fear? If we can see God's hand moving all things, terror is dead for us, and threats are like the whistling of idle wind.

Mark, too, the strong expression of the Church's dependence on God. 'Lord' here is an unusual word, and means 'Master,' while the Church collectively is called 'Thy servants,' or properly, 'slaves.' It is a different word from that of 'servant' (rather than 'child') applied to Jesus in verses 27 and 30. God is the Master, we are His 'slaves,' bound to absolute obedience, unconditional submission, belonging to Him, not to ourselves, and therefore having claims on Him for such care as an owner gives to his slaves or his cattle. He will not let them be maltreated nor starved. He will defend them and feed them; but they must serve him by life, and death if need be. Unquestioning submission and unreserved dependence are our duties,

Absolute ownership and unshared responsibility for our well-being belong to Him.

Further, the view of Christ's relationship to God is the same as occurs in other of the early chapters of the Acts. The title of 'Thy holy Servant Jesus' dwells on Christ's office, rather than on His nature. Here it puts Him in contrast with David, also called 'Thy servant.' The latter was imperfectly what Jesus was perfectly. His complete realisation of the prophetic picture of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is emphasised by the adjective 'holy,' implying complete devotion or separation to the service of God, and unsullied, unlimited moral purity. The uniqueness of His relation in this aspect is expressed by the definite article in the original. He is *the* Servant, in a sense and measure all His own. He is further *the* Anointed Messiah. This was the Church's message to Israel and the stay of its own courage, that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed and perfect Servant of the Lord, who was now in heaven, reigning there. All that this faith involved had not yet become clear to their consciousness, but the Spirit was guiding them step by step into all the truth; and what they saw and heard, not only in the historical facts of which they were the witnesses, but in the teaching of that Spirit, they could not but speak.

The answer came swift as the roll of thunder after lightning. They who ask for courage to do God's will and speak Christ's name have never long to wait for response. The place 'was shaken,' symbol of the effect of faithful witness-bearing, or manifestation of the power which was given in answer to their prayer. 'They were all filled with the Holy Ghost,' who now did not, as before, confer ability to speak with other tongues, but wrought no less worthily in heartening

and fitting them to speak 'in their own tongue, wherein they were born,' in bold defiance of unlawful commands.

The statement of the answer repeats the petition verbatim: 'With all boldness they spake the word.' What we desire of spiritual gifts we get, and God moulds His replies so as to remind us of our petitions, and to show by the event that these have reached His ear and guided His giving hand.

IMPOSSIBLE SILENCE

'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'—ACTS iv. 20.

THE context tells us that the Jewish Council were surprised, as they well might be, at the boldness of Peter and John, and traced it to their having been with Jesus. But do you remember that they were by no means bold when they were with Jesus, and that the bravery came after what, in ordinary circumstances, would have destroyed any of it in a man? A leader's execution is not a usual recipe for heartening his followers, but it had that effect in this case, and the Peter who was frightened out of all his heroics by a sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued servant-maid, a few weeks after bearded the Council and 'rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.' It was not Christ's death that did that, and it was not His life that did that. You cannot understand, to use a long word, the 'psychological' transformation of these cowardly deniers who fled and forsook Him, unless you bring in three things: Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost. Then it is explicable.

However the boldness came; these two men before

the Council were making an epoch at that moment, and their grand words are the Magna Charta of the right of every sincere conviction to free speech. They are the direct parent of hundreds of similar sayings that flash out down the world's history. Two things Peter and John adduced as making silence impossible—a definite divine command, and an inward impulse. 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

But I wish to use these words now in a somewhat wider application. They may suggest that there are great facts which make silence and non-aggressiveness an impossibility for an individual or a Church, and that by the very law of its being, a Church must be a missionary Church, and a Christian cannot be a dumb Christian, unless he is a dead Christian. And so I turn to look at these words as suggesting to us two or three of the grounds on which Christian effort, in some form or another, is inseparable from Christian experience.

And, first, I wish you to notice that there is—

I. An inward necessity which makes silence impossible.

'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,' is a principle that applies far more widely than to the work of a Christian Church, or to any activity that is put in force to spread the name of Jesus Christ. For there is a universal impulse which brings it about that whatever, in the nature of profound conviction, of illuminating truth, especially as affecting moral and spiritual matters, is granted to any man, knocks at the inner side of the door of his lips, and demands an exit and free air and utterance.

As surely as the tender green spikelet of the springing corn pushes its way through the hard clods, or as the bud in the fig-tree's polished stem swells and opens, so surely whatever a man, in his deepest heart, knows to be true, calls upon him to let it out and manifest itself in his words and in his life. 'We believe, and therefore speak,' is a universal sequence. There were four leprous men long ago that, in their despair, made their way into the camp of the beleaguering enemy, found it empty; and after they feasted themselves—and small blame to them—then flashed upon them the thought, 'We do not well, this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some evil will befall us.' Something like that is the uniform accompaniment of all profound conviction. And if so, especially imperative and urgent will this necessity be, wherever there is true Christian life. For whether we consider the greatness of the gift that is imparted to us, in the very act of our receiving that Lord, or whether we consider the soreness of the need of a world that is without Him, surely there can be nothing that so reinforces the natural necessity and impulse to impart what we possess of truth or beauty or goodness as the greatness of the unspeakable gift, and the wretchedness of a world that wants it. Brethren, there are many things that come in the way—and perhaps never more than in our own generation—of Christian men and women making direct and specific efforts, by lip as well as by life, to speak about Jesus Christ to other people. There is the standing hindrance of love of ease and selfish absorption in our own concerns. There are the conventional hindrances of our canons of social intercourse which make it 'bad form' to speak to men about anything beneath the surface, and God forbid

that I should urge any man to a brusque, and indiscriminate, and unwise forcing of his faith upon other people. But I believe, that deep down below all these reasons, there are two main reasons why the practice of the clear utterance of their faith on the part of Christian people is so rare. The one is a deficient conception of what the Gospel is, and the other is a feeble grasp of it for ourselves. If you do not think that you have very much to say, you will not be very anxious to say it; and if your notion of Christianity, and of Christ's relation to the world, is that of the superficial professing Christian, then of course you will be smitten with no earnestness of desire to impart the truth to others. Types of Christianity which enfeeble or obscure the central thought of Christ's work for the salvation of a world that needs a Saviour, and is perishing without Him, never were, never are, never will be, missionary or aggressive. There is no driving force in them. They have little to say, and naturally they are in no hurry to say it. But there is a deeper reason than that. I said a minute ago that a dumb Christian was an impossibility unless he were a dead Christian. And *there* is the reason why so many of us feel so little, so very little, of that knocking at the door of our hearts, and saying, 'Let me out!' which we should feel if we deeply believed, and felt, as well as intellectually accepted, the gospel of our salvation.

The cause of a silent Church is a defective conception of the Gospel entrusted to it, or a feeble grasp of the same. And as our silence or indifference is the symptom, so by reaction it is in its turn the cause of a greater enfeeblement of our faith, and of a weaker grasp of the Gospel. Of course I know that it is perfectly possible for a man to talk away his convictions, and I

am afraid that that temptation which besets all men of my profession, is not always resisted by us as it ought to be. But, on the other hand, sure am I that no better way can be devised of deepening my own hold of the truths of Christianity than an honest, right attempt to make another share my morsel with me. Convictions bottled, like other things bottled up, are apt to evaporate and to spoil. They say that sometimes wine-growers, when they go down into their cellars, find in a puncheon no wine, but a huge fungus. That is what befalls the Christianity of people that never let air in, and never speak their faith out. 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard'; and if we do not speak, the vision fades and the sound becomes faint.

Now there is another side to this same inward necessity of which I have been speaking, on which I must just touch. I have referred to the impulse which flows from the possession of the Gospel. There is an impulse which flows from that which is but another way of putting the same thing, the union with Jesus Christ, which is the result of our faith in the Gospel. If I am a Christian I am, in a very profound and real sense, one with Jesus Christ, and have His Spirit for the life of my spirit. And in the measure in which I am thus one with Him, I shall look at things as He looks at them, and do such things as He did. If the mind of Jesus Christ is in us 'Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross,' who 'counted not equality with God a thing to be desired, but made Himself of no reputation,' and 'was found in fashion as a man,' then we too shall feel that our work in the world is not done, and our obligations to Him are not discharged, unless to the very last particle of our power we spread His name. Brethren, if there were no command-

ment at all from Christ's lips laying upon His followers the specific duty of making His gospel known, still this inward impulse of which I am speaking would have created all the forms of Christian aggressiveness which we see round about us, because, if we have Christ and His Gospel in our hearts, 'we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

And now turn to another aspect of this matter. There is—

II. A command which makes silence criminal.

I do not need to do more than remind you of the fact that the very last words which our Lord has left us according to the two versions of them which are given in the Gospel of Matthew, and the beginning of this Book of the Acts, coincide in this. 'You are to be My witnesses to the ends of the earth. Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.' Did you ever think what an extraordinary thing it is that that confident anticipation of a worldwide dominion, and of being Himself adapted to all mankind, in every climate and in every age, and at every stage of culture, should have been the conviction which the departing Christ sought to stamp upon the minds of those eleven poor men? What audacity! What tremendous confidence! What a task to which to set them! What an unexampled belief in Himself and His work! And it is all coming true; for the world is finding out, more and more, that Jesus Christ is its Saviour and its King.

This commandment which is laid upon us Christian men submerges all distinctions of race, and speech, and nationality, and culture. There are high walls parting men off from one another. This great message and commission, like some rising tide, rolls over them all, and obliterates them, and flows boundless, having drowned

the differences, from horizon to horizon, east and west and south and north.

Now let me press the thought that this commandment makes indifference and silence criminal. We hear people talk, people whose Christianity it is not for me to question, though I may question two things about it, its clearness and its depth—we hear them talk as if to help or not to help, in the various forms of Christian activity, missionary or otherwise, was a matter left to their own inclination. No! it is not. Let us distinctly understand that to help or not to help is not the choice open to any man who would obey Jesus Christ. Let us distinctly understand—and God grant that we may all feel it more—that we dare not stand aside, be negligent, do nothing, leave other people to give and to toil, and say, ‘Oh! my sympathies do not go in that direction.’ Jesus Christ told you that they were to go in that direction, and if they do not, so much the worse for the sympathies for one thing, and so much the worse for you, the rebel, the disobedient in heart. I do not want to bring down this great gift and token of love which Jesus Christ has given to His servants, in entrusting them with the spread of the Gospel, to the low level of a mere commandment, but I do sometimes think that the tone of feeling, ay! and of speech, and still more the manner of action, among professing Christian people, in regard to the whole subject of the missionary work of God’s Church, shows that they need to be reminded; as the Duke of Wellington said, ‘There are your marching orders!’ and the soldier who does not obey his marching orders is a mutineer. There is a definite commandment which makes indifference criminal.

There is another thing I should like to say, viz. that

this definite commandment overr des everything else. We hear a great deal from unsympathetic critics, which is but a reproduction of an old grumble that did not come from a very creditable source. 'To what purpose is this waste?' Why do you not spend your money upon technical schools, soup-kitchens, housing of the poor, and the like? Well, our answer is, 'He told us.' We hear, too, especially just in these days, a great deal about the necessity for increased caution in pursuing missionary operations in heathen lands. And some people that do not know anything about the subject have ventured to say, for instance, that the missionaries are responsible for Chinese antagonism to Europeans, and for similar phenomena. Well, we are ready to be as wise and prudent as you like. We do not ask any consuls to help us. Our brethren are men who have hazarded their lives; and I never heard of a Baptist missionary running under the skirts of an ambassador, or praying the government to come and protect him. We do not ask for cathedrals to be built, or territory to be ceded, as compensation for the loss of precious lives. But if these advisers of caution mean no more than they say, 'Caution!' we agree. But if they mean, what some of them mean, that we are to be silent for fear of consequences, then, whether it be prime ministers, or magistrates, or mobs that say it, our answer is, 'Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye! We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

So, lastly, there is—

III. The bond of brotherhood which makes silence unnatural.

I have spoken of an inward impulse. That thought turns our attention to our own hearts. I have spoken of

a definite command; that turns our eyes to the Throne. I speak now of a bond of brotherhood. That sends our thoughts out over the whole world. There is such a bond. Jesus Christ by His Incarnation has taken the nature of every man upon Himself, and has brought all men into one. Jesus Christ 'by the grace of God, has tasted death for every man,' and has brought all men into unity. And so the much-abused and vulgarised conception of 'fraternity,' and even the very word 'humanity,' are the creation of Christianity, and flow from these two facts—the Cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Calvary, besides that prior one that 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men.' If that be so, then what flows from that unity, from that brotherhood thus sacredly founded upon the facts of the life and death of Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer? This to begin with, that Christian men are bound to look out over humanity with Christ's eyes, and not—as is largely the case to-day—to regard other nations as enemies and rivals, and the 'lower races' as existing to be exploited for our wealth, to be coerced for our glory, to be conquered for our Empire. We have to think of them as Jesus Christ thought. I cannot but remember days in England when the humanitarian sentiment in regard to the inferior races was far more vigorous, and far more operative in national life than it is to-day. I can go back in boyhood's memory to the emancipation of the West Indian slaves, and that was but the type of the general tendency of thought amongst the better minds of England in those days. Would that it were so now!

But further, brethren, we as Christian people have laid upon us this responsibility by that very bond of brotherhood, that we should carry whithersoever our

influence may go the great message of the Elder Brother who makes us all one. We give much to the 'heathen' populations within our Empire or the reach of our trade. We give them English laws, English science, English literature, English outlooks on life, the English tongue, English vices—opium, profligacy, and the like. Are these all the gifts that we are bound to carry to heathen lands? Dynamos and encyclopædias, gin and rifles, shirtings and castings? Have we not to carry Christ? And all the more because we are so closely knit with so many of them. I wonder how many of you get the greater part of your living out of India and China?

Surely, if there is a place in England where the missionary appeal should be responded to, it is Manchester. 'As a nest hast thou gathered the riches of the nations.' What have you given? Make up the balance-sheet, brethren. 'We are debtors,' let us put down the items:—

Debtors by a common brotherhood.

Debtors by the possession of Christ for ourselves.

Debtors by benefits received.

Debtors by injuries inflicted.

The debit side of the account is heavy. Let us try to discharge some portion of the debt, in the fashion in which the Apostle from whom I have been quoting thought that he would best discharge it when, after declaring himself debtor to many kinds of men, he added, 'So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel.' May we all say, more truly than we have ever said before, 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard!'

THE SERVANT AND THE SLAVES

'Thy servant David . . .'; 'Thy Holy Servant Jesus . . .'; 'Thy servants. — ACTS iv. 25, 27, 29.

I DO not often take fragments of Scripture for texts; but though these are fragments, their juxtaposition results in by no means fragmentary thoughts. There is obvious intention in the recurrence of the expression so frequently in so few verses, and to the elucidation of that intention my remarks will be directed. The words are parts of the Church's prayer on the occasion of its first collision with the civil power. The incident is recorded at full length because it is the *first* of a long and bloody series, in order that succeeding generations might learn their true weapon and their sure defence. Prayer is the right answer to the world's hostility, and they who only ask for courage to stand by their confession will never ask in vain. But it is no part of my intention to deal either with the incident or with this noble prayer.

A word or two of explanation may be necessary as to the language of our texts. You will observe that, in the second of them, I have followed the Revised Version, which, instead of 'Thy holy child,' as in the Authorised Version, reads 'Thy holy Servant.' The alteration is clearly correct. The word, indeed, literally means 'a child,' but, like our own English 'boy,' or even 'man,' or 'maid,' it is used to express the relation of servant, when the desire is to cover over the harsher features of servitude, and to represent the servant as a part of the family. Thus the kindly centurion, who besought Jesus to come and heal his servant, speaks of him as his 'boy.' And that the word is here used in this

secondary sense of 'servant' is unmistakable. For there is no discernible reason why, if stress were meant to be laid on Christ as being the Son of God, the recognised expression for that relationship should not have been employed. Again, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, with which the Apostles were familiar, employs the very phrase that is here used as its translation of the well-known Old Testament designation of the Messiah, 'the Servant of the Lord,' and the words here are really a quotation from the great prophecies of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. Further, the same word is employed in reference to King David and in reference to Jesus Christ. In regard to the former, it is evident that it must have the meaning of 'servant'; and it would be too harsh to suppose that in the compass of so few verses the same expression should be used, at one time in the one signification, and at another in the other. So, then, David and Jesus are in some sense classified here together as both servants of God. That is the first point that I desire to make.

Then, in regard to the third of my texts, the expression is not the same there as in the other two. The disciples do not venture to take the loftier designation. Rather they prefer the humble one, 'slaves,' bondmen, the familiar expression found all through the New Testament as almost a synonym to Christians.

So, then, we have here three figures: the Psalmist-king, the Messiah, the disciples; Christ in the midst, on the one hand a servant with whom He deigns to be classed, on the other hand the slaves who, through Him, have become sons. And I think I shall best bring out the intended lessons of these clauses in their connection if I ask you to note these two contrasts, the

servants and the Servant; the Servant and the slaves. 'David Thy servant'; 'Thy holy Servant Jesus'; us 'Thy servants.'

I. First, then, notice the servants and the Servant.

The reason for the application of the name to the Psalmist lies, not so much in his personal character or in his religious elevation, as in the fact that he was chosen of God for a specific purpose, to carry on the divine plans some steps towards their realisation. Kings, priests, prophets, the collective Israel, as having a specific function in the world, and being, in some sense, the instruments and embodiments of the will of God amongst men, have in an eminent degree the designation of His 'servants.' And we might widen out the thought and say that all men who, like the heathen Cyrus, are God's shepherds, though they do not know it—guided by Him, though they understand not whence comes their power, and blindly do His work in the world, being 'epoch-making' men, as the fashionable phrase goes now—are really, though in a subordinate sense, entitled to the designation.

But then, whilst this is true, and whilst Jesus Christ comes into this category, and is one of these special men raised up and adapted for special service in connection with the carrying out of the divine purpose, mark how emphatically and broadly the line is drawn here between Him and the other members of the class to which, in a certain sense, He does belong. Peter says, 'Thy servant David,' but he says 'Thy *holy* Servant Jesus.' And in the Greek the emphasis is still stronger, because the definite article is employed before the word 'servant.' '*The* holy Servant of Thine'—that is His specific and unique designation.

There are many imperfect instruments of the divine

will. Thinkers and heroes and saints and statesmen and warriors, as well as prophets and priests and kings, are so regarded in Scripture, and may profitably be so regarded by us; but amongst them all there is One who stands in their midst and yet apart from them, because He, and He alone, can say, 'I have done all Thy pleasure, and into my doing of Thy pleasure no bitter leaven of self-regard or by-ends has ever, in the faintest degree, entered.' 'Thy holy Servant Jesus' is the unique designation of *the* Servant of the Lord.

And what is the meaning of *holy*? The word does not originally and primarily refer to character so much as to relation to God. The root idea of holiness is not righteousness nor moral perfectness, but something that lies behind these—viz. separation for the service and uses of God. The first notion of the word is consecration, and, built upon that and resulting from it, moral perfection. So then these men, some of whom had lived beside Jesus Christ for all those years, and had seen everything that He did, and studied Him through and through, had summered and wintered with Him, came away from the close inspection of His character with this thought: He is utterly and entirely devoted to the service of God, and in Him there is neither spot nor wrinkle nor blemish such as is found in all other men.

I need not remind you with what strange persistence of affirmation, and yet with what humility of self-consciousness, our Lord Himself always claimed to be in possession of this entire consecration, and complete obedience, and consequent perfection. Think of human lips saying, 'I do always the things that please Him.' Think of human lips saying, 'My meat is to do the will

of Him that sent me.' Think of a man whose whole life's secret was summed up in this: 'As the Father hath given Me commandment, so'—no more, no less, no otherwise—'so I speak.' Think of a man whose inspiring principle was, consciously to himself, 'not My will, but Thine be done'; and who could say that it was so, and not be met by universal ridicule. There followed in Jesus the moral perfectness that comes from such uninterrupted and complete consecration of self to God. 'Thy servant David,'—what about Bathsheba, David? What about a great many other things in your life? The poet-king, with the poet-nature so sensitive to all the delights of sense, and so easily moved in the matter of pleasure, is but like all God's other servants in the fact of imperfection. In every machine power is lost through friction; and in every man, the noblest and the purest, there is resistance to be overcome ere motion in conformity with the divine impulse can be secured. We pass in review before our minds saints and martyrs and lovely characters by the hundred, and amongst them all there is not a jewel without a flaw, not a mirror without some dint in it where the rays are distorted, or some dark place where the reflecting surface has been rubbed away by the attrition of sin, and where there is no reflection of the divine light. And then we turn to that meek Figure who stands there with the question that has been awaiting an answer for nineteen centuries upon His lips, and is unanswered yet: 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' 'He is the holy Servant,' whose consecration and character mark Him off from all the class to which He belongs as the only one of them all who, in completeness, has executed the Father's purpose, and has never attempted anything contrary to it.

Now there is another step to be taken, and it is this. The Servant who stands out in front of all the group—though the noblest names in the world's history are included therein—could not be *the* Servant unless He were the Son. This designation, as applied to Jesus Christ, is peculiar to these three or four earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It is interesting because it occurs over and over again there, and because it never occurs anywhere else in the New Testament. If we recognise what I think must be recognised, that it is a quotation from the ancient prophecies, and is an assertion of the Messianic character of Jesus, then I think we here see the Church in a period of transition in regard to their conceptions of their Lord. There is no sign that the proper Sonship and Divinity of our Lord was clear before them at this period. They had the facts, but they had not yet come to the distinct apprehension of how much was involved in these. But, if they knew that Jesus Christ had died and had risen again—and they knew that, for they had seen Him—and if they believed that He was the Messiah, and if they were certain that in His character of Messiah there had been faultlessness and absolute perfection—and they were certain of that, because they had lived beside Him—then it would not be long before they took the next step, and said, as I say, 'He cannot be the Servant unless He is more than man.'

And we may well ask ourselves the question, if we admit, as the world does admit, the moral perfectness of Jesus Christ, how comes it that this Man alone managed to escape failures and deflections from the right, and sins, and that He only carried through life a stainless garment, and went down to the grave never having needed, and not needing then, the exercise of

divine forgiveness? Brethren, I venture to say that it is hopeless to account for Jesus Christ on naturalistic principles; and that either you must give up your belief in His sinlessness, or advance, as the Christian Church as a whole advanced, to the other belief, on which alone that perfectness is explicable: 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ! Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father!'

II. And so, secondly, let us turn to the other contrast here—the Servant and the slaves.

I said that the humble group of praying, persecuted believers seemed to have wished to take a lower place than their Master's, even whilst they ventured to assume that, in some sense, they too, like Him, were doing the Father's will. So they chose, by a fine instinct of humility rather than from any dogmatical prepossessions, the name that expresses, in its most absolute and roughest form, the notion of bondage and servitude. He is the Servant; we standing here are slaves. And that this is not an overweighting of the word with more than is meant by it seems to be confirmed by the fact that in the first clause of this prayer, we have, for the only time in the New Testament, God addressed as 'Lord' by the correlative word to *slave*, which has been transferred into English, namely, *despot*.

The true position, then, for a man is to be God's slave. The harsh, repellent features of that wicked institution assume an altogether different character when they become the features of my relation to Him. Absolute submission, unconditional obedience, on the slave's part; and on the part of the Master complete ownership, the right of life and death, the right of disposing of all goods and chattels, the right of separating husband and wife, parents and children, the right of

issuing commandments without a reason, the right to expect that those commandments shall be swiftly, unhesitatingly, punctiliously, and completely performed—these things inhere in our relation to God. Blessed the man who has learned that they do, and has accepted them as his highest glory and the security of his most blessed life! For, brethren, such submission, absolute and unconditional, the blending and the absorption of my own will in His will, is the secret of all that makes manhood glorious and great and happy.

Remember, however, that in the New Testament these names of slave and owner are transferred to Christians and Jesus Christ. 'The Servant' has His slaves; and He who is God's Servant, and does not His own will but the Father's will, has us for His servants, imposes His will upon us, and we are bound to render to Him a revenue of entire obedience like that which He hath laid at His Father's feet.

Such slavery is the only freedom. Liberty does not mean doing as you like, it means liking as you ought, and doing that. He only is free who submits to God in Christ, and thereby overcomes himself and the world and all antagonism, and is able to do that which it is his life to do. A prison out of which we do not desire to go is no restraint, and the will which coincides with law is the only will that is truly free. You talk about the bondage of obedience. Ah! 'the weight of too much liberty' is a far sorer bondage. They are the slaves who say, 'Let us break His bonds asunder, and cast away His cords from us'; and they are the free men who say, 'Lord, put Thy blessed shackles on my arms, and impose Thy will upon my will, and fill my heart with Thy love; and then will and hands will

move freely and delightedly.' 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'

Such slavery is the only nobility. In the wicked old empires, as in some of their modern survivals to-day, viziers and prime ministers were mostly drawn from the servile classes. It is so in God's kingdom. They who make themselves God's slaves are by Him made kings and priests, and shall reign with Him on earth. If we are slaves, then are we sons and heirs of God through Jesus Christ.

Remember the alternative. You cannot be your own masters without being your own slaves. It is a far worse bondage to live as chartered libertines than to walk in the paths of obedience. Better serve God than the devil, than the world, than the flesh. Whilst they promise men liberty, they make them 'the most abject and downtrodden vassals of perdition.'

The Servant-Son makes us slaves and sons. It matters nothing to me that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the law of God; it is so much the better for Him, but of no value for me, unless He has the power of making me like Himself. And He has it, and if you will trust yourselves to Him, and give your hearts to Him, and ask Him to govern you, He will govern you; and if you will abandon your false liberty which is servitude, and take the sober freedom which is obedience, then He will bring you to share in His temper of joyful service; and even we may be able to say, 'My meat and my drink is to do the will of Him that sent me,' and truly saying that, we shall have the key to all delights, and our feet will be, at least, on the lower rungs of the ladder whose top reaches to Heaven.

'What fruit had ye in the things of which ye are now ashamed? But being made free from sin, and

become the slaves of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness; and the end everlasting life.' Brethren, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves to Him, crying, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds.'

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'—Acts iv. 32.

'And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.'—Acts v. 11.

ONCE more Luke pauses and gives a general survey of the Church's condition. It comes in appropriately at the end of the account of the triumph over the first assault of civil authority, which assault was itself not only baffled, but turned to good. Just because persecution had driven them closer to God and to one another, were the disciples so full of brotherly love and of grace as Luke delights to paint them.

I. We note the fair picture of what the Church once was. The recent large accessions to it might have weakened the first feelings of brotherhood, so that it is by no means superfluous to repeat substantially the features of the earlier description (Acts ii. 44, 45). 'The multitude' is used with great meaning, for it was a triumph of the Spirit's influence that the warm stream of brotherly love ran through so many hearts, knit together only by common submission to Jesus. That oneness of thought and feeling was the direct issue of the influx of the Spirit mentioned as the blessed result of the disciples' dauntless devotion (Acts iv. 31). If our Churches were 'filled with the Holy Ghost,' we

too should be fused into oneness of heart and mind, though our organisations as separate communities continued, just as all the little pools below high-water mark are made one when the tide comes up.

The first result and marvellous proof of that oneness was the so-called 'community of goods,' the account of which is remarkable both because it all but fills this picture, and because it is broken into two by verse 33, rapidly summarising other characteristics. The two halves may be considered together, and it may be noted that the former presents the sharing of property as the result of brotherly unity, while the latter traces it ('for,' v. 34) to the abundant divine grace resting on the whole community. The terms of the description should be noted, as completely negating the notion that the fact in question was anything like compulsory abolition of the right of individual ownership. 'Not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own.' That implies that the right of possession was not abolished. It implies, too, that the common feeling of brotherhood was stronger than the self-centred regard which looks on possessions as to be used for self. Thus they possessed as though they possessed not, and each held his property as a trust from God for his brethren.

We must observe, further, that the act of selling was the owners', as was the act of handing the proceeds to the Apostles. The community had nothing to do with the money till it had been given to them. Further, the distribution was not determined by the rule of equality, but by the 'need' of the recipients; and its result was not that all had share and share alike, but that 'none lacked.'

There is nothing of modern communism in all this, but there is a lesson to the modern Church as to the obligations of wealth and the claims of brotherhood, which is all but universally disregarded. The spectre of communism is troubling every nation, and it will become more and more formidable, unless the Church learns that the only way to lay it is to live by the precepts of Jesus and to repeat in new forms the spirit of the primitive Church. The Christian sense of stewardship, not the abolition of the right of property, is the cure for the hideous facts which drive men to shriek 'Property is theft.'

Luke adds two more points to his survey,—the power of the Apostolic testimony, and the great grace which lay like a bright cloud on the whole Church. The Apostles' special office was to bear witness to the Resurrection. They held a position of prominence in the Church by virtue of having been chosen by Jesus and having been His companions, but the Book of Acts is silent about any of the other mysterious powers which later ages have ascribed to them. The only Apostles who appear in it are Peter, John, and James, the last only in a parenthesis recording His martyrdom. Their peculiar work was to say, 'Behold! we saw, and know that He died and rose again.'

II. The general description is followed by one example of the surrender of wealth, which is noteworthy as being done by one afterwards to play a great part in the book, and also as leading on to an example of hypocritical pretence. Side by side stand Barnabas and the wretched couple, Ananias and Sapphira.

Luke introduces the new personage with some particularity, and, as he does not go into detail without good reason, we must note his description. First, the

man's character is given, as expressed in the name bestowed by the Apostles, in imitation of Christ's frequent custom. He must have been for some time a disciple, in order that his special gift should have been recognised. He was a 'son of exhortation'; that is, he had the power of rousing and encouraging the faith and stirring the believing energy of the brethren. An example of this was given in Antioch, where he 'exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.' So much the more beautiful was his self-effacement when with Paul, for it was the latter who was 'the chief speaker.' Barnabas felt that his gift was less than his brother's, and so, without jealousy, took the second place. He, being silent, yet speaketh, and bids us learn our limits, and be content to be surpassed.

We are next told his rank. He was a Levite. The tribe to which a disciple belongs is seldom mentioned, but probably the reason for specifying Barnabas' was the same as led Luke, in another place, to record that 'a great company of the priests was obedient to the faith.' The connection of the tribe of Levi with the Temple worship made accessions from it significant, as showing how surely the new faith was creeping into the very heart of the old system, and winning converts from the very classes most interested in opposing it. Barnabas' significance is further indicated by the notice that he was 'a man of Cyprus,' and as such, the earliest mentioned of the Hellenists or foreign-born and Greek-speaking Jews, who were to play so important a part in the expansion of the Church.

His first appearance witnessed to the depth and simple genuineness of his character and faith. The old law forbidding Levites to hold land had gradually

become inoperative, and perhaps Barnabas' estate was in Cyprus, though more probably it was, like that of his relative Mary, the mother of Mark, in Jerusalem. He did as many others were doing, and brought the proceeds to the assembly of the brethren, and there publicly laid them at the Apostles' feet, in token of their authority to administer them as they thought well.

III. Why was Barnabas' act singled out for mention, since there was nothing peculiar about it? Most likely because it stimulated Ananias and his wife to imitation. Wherever there are signal instances of Christian self-sacrifice, there will spring up a crop of base copies. Ananias follows Barnabas as surely as the shadow the substance. It was, very likely, a pure impulse which led him and his wife to agree to sell their land; and it was only when they had the money in their hands, and had to take the decisive step of parting with it, and reducing themselves to pennilessness, that they found the surrender harder than they could carry out. Satan spoils many a well-begun work, and we often break down half-way through a piece of Christian unselfishness. Well begun is half—but only half—ended.

Be that as it may, Peter's stern words to Ananias put all the stress of the sin on its being an acted lie. The motives of the trick are not disclosed. They may have been avarice, want of faith, greed of applause, reluctance to hang back when others were doing like Barnabas. It is hard to read the mingled motives which lead ourselves wrong, and harder to separate them in the case of another. How much Ananias kept back is of no moment; indeed, the less he retained the greater the sin; for it is baser, as well as more foolish, to do wrong for a little advantage than for a great one.

Peter's two questions bring out very strikingly the double source of the sin. 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart?'—an awful antithesis to being filled with the Spirit. Then there is a real, malign Tempter, who can pour evil affections and purposes into men's hearts. But he cannot do it unless the man opens his heart, as that 'why?' implies. The same thought of our co-operation and concurrence, so that, however Satan suggests, it is we who are guilty, comes out in the second question, 'How is it that *thou* hast conceived this thing in thy heart?' Reverently we may venture to say that not only Christ stands at the door and knocks, but that the enemy of Him and His stands there too, and he too enters 'if any man opens the door.' Neither heaven nor hell can come in unless we will.

The death of Ananias was not inflicted by Peter. 'Hearing these words' he 'fell down and' died. Surely that expression suggests that the stern words had struck at his life, and that his death was the result of the agitation of shame and guilt which they excited. That does not at all conflict with regarding his death as a punitive divine act.

One can fancy the awed silence that fell on the congregation, and the restrained, mournful movement that ran through it when Sapphira entered. Why the two had not come in company can only be conjectured. Perhaps the husband had gone straight to the Apostles after completing the sale, and had left the wife to follow at her convenience. Perhaps she had not intended to come at all, but had grown alarmed at the delay in Ananias' return. She may have come in fear that something had gone wrong, and that fear would be increased by her not seeing her husband in her quick glance round the company.

If she came expecting to receive applause, the silence and constraint that hung over the assembly must have stirred a fear that something terrible had happened, which would be increased by Peter's question. It was a merciful opportunity given her to separate herself from the sin and the punishment; but her lie was glib, and indicated determination to stick to the fraud. That moment was heavy with her fate, and she knew it not; but she knew that she had the opportunity of telling the truth, and she did not take it. She had to make the hard choice which we have sometimes to make, to be true to some sinful bargain or be true to God, and she chose the worse part. Which of the two was tempter and which was tempted matters little. Like many a wife, she thought that it was better to be loyal to her husband than to God, and so her honour was 'rooted in dishonour,' and she was falsely true and truly false.

The judgment on Sapphira was not inflicted by Peter. He foretold it by his prophetic power, but it was the hand of God which vindicated the purity of the infant Church. The terrible severity of the punishment can only be understood by remembering the importance of preserving the young community from corruption at the very beginning. Unless the vermin are cleared from the springing plant, it will not grow. As Achan's death warned Israel at the beginning of their entrance into the promised land, so Ananias and Sapphira perished, that all generations of the Church might fear to pretend to self-surrender while cherishing its opposite, and might feel that they have to give account to One who knows the secrets of the heart, and counts nothing as given if anything is surreptitiously kept back.

WHOM TO OBEY,—ANNAS OR ANGEL?

'Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18. And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20. Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. 21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23. Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. 25. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. 27. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28. Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. 30. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.'—ACTS v. 17-32.

THE Jewish ecclesiastics had been beaten in the first round of the fight, and their attempt to put out the fire had only stirred the blaze. Popular sympathy is fickle, and if the crowd does not shout with the persecutors, it will make heroes and idols of the persecuted. So the Apostles had gained favour by the attempt to silence them, and that led to the second round, part of which is described in this passage.

The first point to note is the mean motives which influenced the high-priest and his adherents. As before, the Sadducees were at the bottom of the assault; for talk about a resurrection was gall and wormwood to them. But Luke alleges a much more contemptible emotion than zeal for supposed truth as the motive for action. The word rendered in the Authorised Version

‘indignation,’ is indeed literally ‘zeal,’ but it here means, as the Revised Version has it, nothing nobler than ‘jealousy.’ ‘Who are those ignorant Galileans that they should encroach on the office of us dignified teachers? and what fools the populace must be to listen to them! Our prestige is threatened. If we don’t bestir ourselves, our authority will be gone.’ A lofty spirit in which to deal with grave movements of opinion, and likely to lead its possessors to discern truth!

The Sanhedrin, no doubt, talked solemnly about the progress of error, and the duty of firmly putting it down, and, like Jehu, said, ‘Come, and see our zeal for the Lord’; but it was zeal for greetings in the market-place, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the other advantages of their position. So it has often been since. The instruments which zeal for truth uses are argument, Scripture, and persuasion. That zeal which betakes itself to threats and force is, at the best, much mingled with the wrath and jealousy of man.

The arrest of the Apostles and their committal to prison was simply for detention, not punishment. The rulers cast their net wider this time, and secured all the Apostles, and, having them safe under lock and key, they went home triumphant, and expecting to deal a decisive blow to-morrow. Then comes one of the great ‘buts’ of Scripture. Annas and Caiaphas thought that they had scored a success, but an angel upset their calculations. To try to explain the miracle away is hopeless. It is wiser to try to understand it.

The very fact that it did not lead to the Apostles’ deliverance, but that the trial and scourging followed next day, just as if it had not happened, which has been alleged as a proof of its uselessness, and inferen-

tially of its falsehood, puts us on the right track. It was not meant for their deliverance, but for their heartening, and for the bracing of all generations of Christians, by showing, at the first conflict with the civil power, that the Lord was with His Church. His strengthening power is operative when no miracle is wrought. If His servants are not delivered, it is not that He lacks angels, but that it is better for them and the Church that they should lie in prison or die at the stake.

The miracle was a transient revelation of a perpetual truth, and has shed light on many a dark dungeon where God's servants have lain rotting. It breathed heroic constancy into the Twelve. How striking and noble was their prompt obedience to the command to resume the perilous work of preaching! As soon as the dawn began to glimmer over Olivet, and the priests were preparing for the morning sacrifice, there were these irrepressible disturbers, whom the officials thought they had shut up safely last night, lifting up their voices again as if nothing had happened. What a picture of dauntless persistence, and what a lesson for us! The moment the pressure is off, we should spring back to our work of witnessing for Christ.

The bewilderment of the Council comes in strong contrast with the unhesitating action of the Apostles. There is a half ludicrous side to it, which Luke does not try to hide. There was the pompous assembling of all the great men at early morning, and their dignified waiting till their underlings brought in the culprits. No doubt, Annas put on his severest air of majesty, and all were prepared to look their sternest for the confusion of the prisoners. The prison, the

Temple, and the judgment hall, were all near each other. So there was not long to wait. But, behold! the officers come back alone, and their report shakes the assembly out of its dignity. One sees the astonished underlings coming up to the prison, and finding all in order, the sentries patrolling, the doors fast (so the angel had shut them as well as opened them), and then entering ready to drag out the prisoners, and—finding all silent. Such elaborate guard kept over an empty cage!

It was not the officers' business to offer explanations, and it does not seem that any were asked. One would have thought that the sentries would have been questioned. Herod went the natural way to work, when he had Peter's guards examined and put to death. But Annas and his fellows do not seem to have cared to inquire how the escape had been made. Possibly they suspected a miracle, or perhaps feared that inquiry might reveal sympathisers with the prisoners among their own officials. At any rate, they were bewildered, and lost their heads, wondering what was to come next, and how this thing was to end.

The further news that these obstinate fanatics were at their old work in the Temple again, must have greatly added to the rulers' perplexity, and they must have waited the return of the officers sent off for the second time to fetch the prisoners, with somewhat less dignity than before. The officers felt the pulse of the crowd, and did not venture on force, from wholesome fear for their own skins. An excited mob in the Temple court was not to be trifled with, so persuasion was adopted. The brave Twelve went willingly, for the Sanhedrin had no terrors for them, and by going they secured another opportunity of ringing out their Lord's salva-

tion. Wherever a Christian can witness for Christ, he should be ready to go.

The high-priest discreetly said nothing about the escape. Possibly he had no suspicion of a miracle, but, even if he had, chapter iv. 16 shows that that would not have led to any modification of his hostility. Persecutors, clothed with a little brief authority, are strangely blind to the plainest indications of the truth spoken by their victims. Annas did not know what a question about the escape might bring out, so he took the safer course of charging the Twelve with disobedience to the Sanhedrin's prohibition. How characteristic of all his kind that is! Never mind whether what the martyr says is true or not. He has broken our law, and defied our authority; that is enough. Are we to be chopping logic, and arguing with every ignorant upstart who chooses to vent his heresies? Gag him,—that is easier and more dignified.

A world of self-consequence peeps out in that '*we* straitly charged you,' and a world of contempt peeps out in the avoidance of naming Jesus. 'This name' and 'this man' is the nearest that the proud priest will come to soiling his lips by mentioning Him. He bears unconscious testimony to the Apostles' diligence, and to the popular inclination to them, by charging them with having filled the city with what he contemptuously calls '*your* teaching,' as if it had no other source than their own ignorant notions.

Then the deepest reason for the Sanhedrin's bitterness leaks out in the charge of inciting the mob to take vengeance on them for the death of Jesus. It was true that the Apostles had charged that guilt home on them, but not on them only, but on the whole nation, so that no incitement to revenge lay in the

charge. It was true that they had brought 'this man's blood' on the rulers, but only to draw them to repentance, not to hound at them their sharers in the guilt. Had Annas forgot 'His blood be on us, and on our children'? But, when an evil deed is complete, the doers try to shuffle off the responsibility which they were ready to take in the excitement of hurrying to do it. Annas did not trouble himself about divine vengeance; it was the populace whom he feared.

So, in its attempt to browbeat the accused, in its empty airs of authority, in its utter indifference to the truth involved, in its contempt for the preachers and their message, in its brazen denial of responsibility, its dread of the mob, and its disregard of the far-off divine judgment, his bullying speech is a type of how persecutors, from Roman governors down, have hectorated their victims.

And Peter's brave answer is, thank God! the type of what thousands of trembling women and meek men have answered. His tone is severer now than on his former appearance. Now he has no courteous recognition of the court's authority. Now he brushes aside all Annas's attempts to impose on him the sanctity of its decrees, and flatly denies that the Council has any more right to command than any other 'men.' They claimed to be depositaries of God's judgments. This revolutionary fisherman sees nothing in them but 'men,' whose commands point one way, while God's point the other. The angel bade them 'speak'; the Council had bid them be dumb. To state the opposition was to determine their duty. Formerly Peter had said 'judge ye' which command it is right to obey. Now, he wraps his refusal in no folds of courtesy, but thrusts the naked 'We must obey God' in the Council's

face. That was a great moment in the history of the world and the Church. How much lay in it, as in a seed,—Luther's 'Here I stand, I can do none other. God help me! Amen'; Plymouth Rock, and many a glorious and blood-stained page in the records of martyrdom.

Peter goes on to vindicate his assumption that in disobeying Annas they are obeying God, by reiterating the facts which since Pentecost he had pressed on the national conscience. Israel had slain, and God had exalted, Jesus to His right hand. That was God's verdict on Israel's action. But it was also the ground of hope for Israel; for the exaltation of Jesus was that He might be 'Prince [or Leader] and Saviour,' and from His exalted hand were shed the gifts of 'repentance and remission of sins,' even of the great sin of slaying Him. These things being so, how could the Apostles be silent? Had not God bid them speak, by their very knowledge of these? They were Christ's witnesses, constituted as such by their personal acquaintance with Him and their having seen Him raised and ascending, and appointed to be such by His own lips, and inspired for their witnessing by the Holy Spirit shed on them at Pentecost. Peter all but reproduces the never-to-be-forgotten words heard by them all in the upper room, 'He shall bear witness of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.' Silence would be treason. So it is still. What were Annas and his bluster to men whom Christ had bidden to speak, and to whom He had given the Spirit of the Father to speak in them?

OUR CAPTAIN

'Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince.'—ACTS v. 31.

THE word rendered 'Prince' is a rather infrequent designation of our Lord in Scripture. It is only employed in all four times—twice in Peter's earlier sermons recorded in this Book of the Acts; and twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In a former discourse of the Apostle's he had spoken of the crime of the Jews in killing 'the Prince of life.' Here he uses the word without any appended epithet. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read once of the 'Captain of Salvation,' and once of the 'Author of Faith.'

Now these three renderings 'Prince,' 'Captain,' 'Author,' seem singularly unlike. But the explanation of their being all substantially equivalent to the original word is not difficult to find. It seems to mean properly a Beginner, or Originator, who takes the lead in anything, and hence the notions of chieftainship and priority are easily deduced from it. Then, very naturally, it comes to mean something very much like *cause*; with only this difference, that it implies that the person who is the Originator is Himself the Possessor of that of which He is the Cause to others. So the two ideas of a Leader, and of a Possessor who imparts, are both included in the word.

My intention in this sermon is to deal with the various forms of this expression, in order to try to bring out the fulness of the notion which Scripture attaches to this leadership of Jesus Christ. He is first of all, generally, as our text sets Him forth, the Leader, absolutely. Then there are the specific aspects, expressed by the other three passages, in which He

is set forth as the Leader through death to life; the Leader through suffering to salvation; and the Leader in the path of faith. Let us look, then, at these points in succession.

I. First, we have the general notion of Christ the Leader.

Now I suppose we are all acquainted with the fact that the names 'Joshua' and 'Jesus' are, in the original, one. It is further to be noticed that, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was familiar to Peter's hearers, the word of our text is that employed to describe the office of the military leaders of Israel. It is still further to be observed that, in all the instances in the New Testament, it is employed in immediate connection with the name of Jesus. Now, putting all these things together, remembering to whom Peter was speaking, remembering the familiarity which many of his audience must have had with the Old Testament in its Greek translation, remembering the identity of the two names Joshua and Jesus, it is difficult to avoid the supposition that the expression of our text is coloured by a reference to the bold soldier who successfully led his brethren into the Promised Land. Joshua was the 'Captain of the Lord's host' to lead them to Canaan; the second Joshua is the Captain of the Host of the Lord to lead them to a better rest. Of all the Old Testament heroes perhaps there is none, at first sight, less like the second Joshua than the first was. He is only a rough, plain, prompt, and bold soldier. No prophet was he, no word of wisdom ever fell from his lips, no trace of tenderness was in anything that he did; meekness was alien from his character, he was no sage, he was no saint, but decisive, swift, merciless when

necessary, full of resource, sharp and hard as his own sword. And yet a parallel may be drawn.

The second Joshua is the Captain of the Lord's host, as was typified to the first one, in that strange scene outside the walls of Jericho, where the earthly commander, sunk in thought, was brooding upon the hard nut which he had to crack, when suddenly he lifted up his eyes, and beheld a man with a drawn sword. With the instinctive alertness of his profession and character, his immediate question was, 'Art thou for us or for our enemies?' And he got the answer 'No! I am not on thy side, nor on the other side, but thou art on Mine. As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up.'

So Jesus Christ, the 'Strong Son of God,' is set forth by this military emblem as being Himself the first Soldier in the army of God, and the Leader of all the host. We forget far too much the militant character of Jesus Christ. We think of His meekness, His gentleness, His patience, His tenderness, His humility, and we cannot think of these too much, too lovingly, too wonderingly, too adoringly, but we too often forget the strength which underlay the gentleness, and that His life, all gracious as it was, when looked at from the outside, had beneath it a continual conflict, and was in effect the warfare of God against all the evils and the sorrows of humanity. We forget the courage that went to make the gentleness of Jesus, the daring that underlay His lowliness; and it does us good to remember that all the so-called heroic virtues were set forth in supreme form, not in some vulgar type of excellence, such as a conqueror, whom the world recognises, but in that meek King whose weapon was love, yet was wielded with a soldier's hand.

This general thought of Jesus Christ as the first Soldier and Captain of the Lord's army not only opens for us a side of His character which we too often pass by, but it also says something to us as to what our duties ought to be. He stands to us in the relation of General and Commander-in-Chief; then we stand to Him in the relation of private soldiers, whose first duty is unhesitating obedience, and who in doing their Master's will must put forth a bravery far higher than the vulgar courage that is crowned with wreathed laurels on the bloody battlefield, even the bravery that is caught from Him who 'set His face as a flint' to do His work.

Joshua's career has in it a great stumbling-block to many people, in that merciless destruction of the Canaanite sinners, which can only be vindicated by remembering, first, that it was a divine appointment, and that God has the right to punish; and, second, that those old days were under a different law, or at least a less manifestly developed law of loving-kindness and mercy than, thank God! we live in. But whilst we look with wonder on these awful scenes of destruction, may there not lie in them the lesson for us that antagonism and righteous wrath against evil in all its forms is the duty of the soldiers of Christ? There are many causes to-day which to further and fight for is the bounden duty of every Christian, and to further and fight for which will tax all the courage that any of us can muster. Remember that the leadership of Christ is no mere pretty metaphor, but a solemn fact, which brings with it the soldier's responsibilities. When our Centurion says to us, 'Come!' we must come. When He says to us, 'Go!' we must go. When He says to us 'Do this!' we must do it, though heart and flesh

should shrink and fail. Unhesitating obedience to His authoritative command will deliver us from many of the miseries of self-will; and brave effort at Christ's side is as much the privilege as the duty of His servants and soldiers.

II. So note, secondly, the Leader through death to life.

Peter, in the sermon which is found in the third chapter of this Book of the Acts, has his mind and heart filled with the astounding fact of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and in the same breath as he gives forth the paradoxical indictment of the Jewish sin, 'You have killed the Prince of Life'—the Leader of Life—he also says, 'And God hath raised Him from the dead.' So that the connection seems to point to the risen and glorified life into which Christ Himself passed, and by passing became capable of imparting it to others. The same idea is here as in Paul's other metaphor: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'—the first sheaf of the harvest, which was carried into the Temple and consecrated to God, and was the pledge and prophecy of the reaping in due season of all the miles of golden grain that waved in the autumn sunshine. 'So,' says Peter, 'He is the Leader of Life, who Himself has passed through the darkness, for "you killed Him"; mystery of mysteries as it is that you should have been able to do it, deeper mystery still that you should have been willing to do it, deepest mystery of all that you did it not when you did it, but that "He became dead and is alive for evermore." You killed the Prince of Life, and God raised Him from the dead.'

He has gone before us. He is 'the first that should

rise from the dead.' For, although the partial power of His communicated life did breathe for a moment resuscitation into two dead men and one dead maiden, these shared in no resurrection-life, but only came back again into mortality, and were quickened for a time, but to die at last the common death of all. But Jesus Christ is the first that has gone into the darkness and come back again to live for ever. Across the untrodden wild there is one track marked, and the footprints upon it point both ways—to the darkness and from the darkness. So the dreary waste is not pathless any more. The broad road that all the generations have trodden on their way into the everlasting darkness is left now, and the 'travellers pass by the byway' which Jesus Christ has made by the touch of His risen feet.

Thus, not only does this thought teach us the priority of His resurrection-life, but it also declares to us that Jesus Christ, possessing the risen life, possesses it to impart it. For, as I remarked in my introductory observations, the conception of this word includes not only the idea of a Leader, but that of One who, Himself possessing or experiencing something, gives it to others. All men rise again. Yes, 'but every man in his own order.' There are two principles at work in the resurrection of all men. They are raised on different grounds, and they are raised to different issues. They that are Christ's are brought again from the dead, because the life of Christ is in them; and it is as 'impossible' that they, as that 'He, should be holden of it.' Union with Jesus Christ by simple faith is the means, and the only means revealed to us, whereby men shall be raised from the dead at the last by a resurrection which is anything else than

a prolonged death. As for others, 'some shall rise unto shame and everlasting contempt,' rising dead, and dead after they are risen—dead as long as they live. There be two resurrections, whether simultaneous in time or not is of no moment, and all of us must have our part in the one or the other; and faith in Jesus Christ is the only means by which we can take a place in the great army and procession that He leads down into the valley and up to the sunny heights.

If He be the Leader through death unto life, then it is certain that all who follow in His train shall attain to His side and shall share in His glory. The General wears no order which the humblest private in the ranks may not receive likewise, and whomsoever He leads, His leading will not end till He has led them close to His side, if they trust Him. So, calmly, confidently, we may each of us look forward to that dark journey waiting for us all. All our friends will leave us at the tunnel's mouth, but He will go with us through the gloom, and bring us out into the sunny lands on the southern side of the icy white mountains. The Leader of our souls will be our Guide, not only unto death, but far beyond it, into His own life.

III. So, thirdly, note the Leader through suffering to salvation.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is written, 'It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain'—or the Leader—'of their salvation perfect through sufferings.' That expression might seem at first to shut Jesus Christ out from any participation in the thing which He gives. For salvation is His gift,

but not that which He Himself possesses and enjoys; but it is to be noticed that in the context of the words which I have quoted, 'glory' is put as substantially synonymous with salvation, and that the whole is suffused with the idea of a long procession, as shown by the phrase, 'bringing many sons.' Of this procession Jesus Christ Himself is the Leader.

So, clearly, the notion in the context now under consideration is that the life of Jesus Christ is the type to which all His servants are to be conformed. He is the Representative Man, who Himself passes through the conditions through which we are to pass, and Himself reaches the glory which, given to us, becomes salvation.

'Christ is perfected through sufferings.' So must we be. Perfected through sufferings? you say. Then did His humanity need perfecting? Yes, and No. There needed nothing to be hewn away from that white marble. There was nothing to be purged by fire out of that pure life. But I suppose that Jesus Christ's human nature needed to be unfolded by life; as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'He learned obedience, though He were a Son, through the things which He suffered.' And fitness for His office of leading us to glory required to be reached through the sufferings which were the condition of our forgiveness and of our acceptance with God. So, whether we regard the word as expressing the agony of suffering in unfolding His humanity, or in fitting Him for His redeeming work, it remains true that He was perfected by His sufferings.

So must we be. Our characters will never reach the refinement, the delicacy, the unworldliness, the dependence upon God, which they require for their

completion, unless we have been passed through many a sorrow. There are plants which require a touch of frost to perfect them, and we all need the discipline of a Father's hand. The sorrows that come to us all are far more easily borne when we think that Christ bore them all before us. It is but a blunted sword which sorrow wields against any of us; it was blunted on His armour. It is but a spent ball that strikes us; its force was exhausted upon Him. Sorrow, if we keep close to Him, may become solemn joy, and knit us more thoroughly to Himself. Ah, brother! we can better spare our joys than we can spare our sorrows. Only let us cleave to Him when they fall upon us.

Christ's sufferings led Him to His glory, so will ours if we keep by His side—and only if we do. There is nothing in the mere fact of being tortured and annoyed here on earth, which has in itself any direct and necessary tendency to prepare us for the enjoyment, or to secure to us the possession, of future blessedness. You often hear superficial people saying, 'Oh! he has been very much troubled here, but there will be amends for it hereafter.' Yes; God would wish to make amends for it hereafter, but He cannot do so unless we comply with the conditions. And it needs that we should keep close to Jesus Christ in sorrow, in order that it should work for us 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' The glory will come if the patient endurance has preceded, and has been patience drawn from Jesus.

' I wondered at the beauteous hours,
The slow result of winter showers,
You scarce could see the grass for flowers.'

The sorrows that have wounded any man's head

like a crown of thorns will be covered with the diadem of Heaven, if they are sorrows borne with Christ.

IV. Lastly, we have Jesus, the Leader in the path of faith.

‘The Author of faith,’ says the verse in the Epistle to the Hebrews. ‘Author’ does not cover all the ground, though it does part of it. We must include the other ideas which I have been trying to set forth. He is ‘Possessor’ first and ‘Giver’ afterwards. For Jesus Christ Himself is both the Pattern and the Inspirer of our faith. It would unduly protract my remarks to dwell adequately upon this; but let me just briefly hint some thoughts connected with it.

Jesus Christ Himself walked by continual faith. His manhood depended upon God, just as ours has to depend upon Jesus. He lived in the continued reception of continual strength from above by reason of His faith, just as our faith is the condition of our reception of His strength. We are sometimes afraid to recognise the fact that the Man Jesus, who is our pattern in all things, is our pattern in this, the most special and peculiarly human aspect of the religious life. But if Christ was not the first of believers, His pattern is woefully defective in its adaptation to our need. Rather let us rejoice in the thought that all that great muster-roll of the heroes of the faith, which the Epistle to the Hebrews has been dealing with, have for their Leader—though, chronologically, He marches in the centre—Jesus Christ, of whose humanity this is the document and proof that He says, in the Prophet’s words: ‘I will put My trust in Him.’

Remember, too, that the same Jesus who is the Pattern is the Object and the Inspirer of our faith; and that if we fulfil the conditions in the text now

under consideration, 'looking off' from all others, stimulating and beautiful as their example may be, sweet and tender as their love may be, and 'looking unto Jesus,' He will be in us, and above us—in us to inspire, and above us to receive and to reward our humble confidence.

So, dear friends, it all comes to this, 'Follow thou Me!' In that commandment all duty is summed, and in obeying it all blessedness and peace are ensured. If we will take Christ for our Captain, He will teach our fingers to fight. If we obey Him we shall not want guidance, and be saved from perplexities born of self-will. If we keep close to Him and turn our eyes to Him, away from all the false and fleeting joys and things of earth, we shall not walk in darkness, howsoever earthly lights may be quenched, but the gloomiest path will be illuminated by His presence, and the roughest made smooth by His bleeding feet that passed along it. If we follow Him, He will lead us down into the dark valley, and up into the blessed sunshine, where participation in His own eternal life and glory will be salvation. If we march in His ranks on earth, then shall we

' With joy upon our heads arise
And meet our Captain in the skies.'

GAMALIEL'S COUNSEL

' Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: 39. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.'—ACTS v. 38, 39.

THE little that is known of Gamaliel seems to indicate just such a man as would be likely to have given the advice in the text. His was a character which, on its

good side and by its admirers, would be described as prudent, wise, cautious and calm, tolerant, opposed to fanaticism and violence. His position as president of the Sanhedrin, his long experience, his Rabbinical training, his old age, and his knowledge that the national liberty depended on keeping things quiet, would be very likely to exaggerate such tendencies into what his enemies would describe as worldly shrewdness without a trace of enthusiasm, indifference to truth, and the like.

It is, of course, possible that he bases his counsel of letting the followers of Jesus alone, on the grounds which he adduces, because he knew that reasons more favourable to Christians would have had no weight with the Sanhedrin. Old Church traditions make him out to have been a Christian, and the earliest Christian romance, a very singular book, of which the main object was to blacken the Apostle Paul, roundly asserts that at the date of this advice he was 'secretly our brother,' and that he remained in the Sanhedrin to further Christian views. But there seems not the slightest reason to suppose that. He lived and died a Jew, spared the sight of the destruction of Jerusalem which, according to his own canon in the text, would have proved that the system to which he had given his life was not of God; and the only relic of his wisdom is a prayer against Christian heretics.

It is remarkable that he should have given this advice; but two things occur to account for it. Thus far Christianity had been very emphatically the preaching of the Resurrection, a truth which the Pharisees believed and held as especially theirs in opposition to the Sadducees, and Gamaliel was old

and worldly-wise enough to count all as his friends who were the enemies of his enemies. He was not very particular where he looked for allies, and rather shrank from helping Sadducees to punish men whose crime was that they 'preached through Jesus a resurrection from the dead.'

Then the Jewish rulers had a very ticklish part to play. They were afraid of any popular shout which might bring down the avalanche of Roman power on them, and they were nervously anxious to keep things quiet. So Gamaliel did not wish to have any fuss made about 'these men,' lest it should be supposed that another popular revolt was on foot; and he thought that to let them alone was the best way to reduce their importance. Perhaps, too, there was a secret hope in the old man's mind, which he scarcely ventured to look at and dared not speak, that here might be the beginning of a rising which had more promise in it than that abortive one under Theudas. He could not venture to say this, but perhaps it made him chary of voting for repression. He had no objection to let these poor Galileans fling away their lives in storming against the barrier of Rome. If they fail, it is but one more failure. If they succeed, he and his like will say that they have done well. But while the enterprise is too perilous for him to approve or be mixed up in it, he would let it have its chance.

Note that Gamaliel regards the whole movement as the probable germ of an uprising against Rome, as is seen from the parallels that he quotes. It is not as a religious teaching which is true or false, but as a political agitation, that he looks at Christianity.

It is to his credit that he stood calm and curbed the howling of the fanatics round him, and that he was

the first and only Jewish authority who counselled abstinence from persecution.

It is interesting to compare him with Gallio, who had a glimpse of the true relation of the civil magistrate to religious opinion. Gamaliel has a glimpse of the truth of the impotence of material force against truth, how it is of a quick and spiritual essence, which cannot be cleaved in pieces with a sword, but lives on in spite of all. But while all this may be true, the advice on the whole is a low and bad one. It rests on false principles; it takes a false view of a man's duty; it is not wholly sincere; and it is one impossible to be carried out. It is singularly in accordance with many of the tendencies of this age, and with modes of thought and counsels of action which are in active operation amongst us to-day, and we may therefore criticise it now.

I. Here is disbelief professing to be 'honest doubt.' Gamaliel professes not to have materials for judging. 'If—if'; was it a time for 'ifs'? What was that Sanhedrin there for, but to try precisely such cases as these?

They had had the works of Christ; miracles which they had investigated and could not disprove; a life which was its own witness; prophecies fulfilled; His own presence before their bar; the Resurrection and the Pentecost.

I am not saying whether these facts were enough to have convinced them, nor even whether the alleged miracles were true. All that I am concerned with is that, so far as we know, neither Gamaliel nor any of his tribe had ever made the slightest attempt to inquire into them, but had, without examination, complacently treated them as lies. All that body of evidence had

been absolutely ignored. And now he is, with his 'ifs,' posing as very calm and dispassionate.

So to-day it is fashionable to doubt, to hang up most of the Christian truths in the category of uncertainties.

(a) When that is the fashion, we need to be on our guard.

(b) If you doubt, have you ever taken the pains to examine?

(c) If you doubt, you are bound to go further, and either reach belief or rejection. Doubt is not the permanent condition for a man. The central truth of Christianity is either to be received or rejected.

II. Here is disbelief masquerading as suspension of judgment.

Gamaliel talked as if he did not know, or had not decided in his own mind, whether the disciples' claims for their Master were just or not. But the attitude of impartiality and hesitation was the cover of rooted unbelief. He speaks as if the alternative was that either this 'counsel and work' was 'of man' or 'of God.' But he would have been nearer the truth if he had stated the antithesis—God or devil; a glorious truth or a hell-born lie. If Christ's work was not a revelation from above, it was certainly an emanation from beneath.

We sometimes hear disbelief, in our own days, talking in much the same fashion. Have we never listened to teachers who first of all prove to their own satisfaction that Jesus is a myth, that all the gospel story is unreliable, and all the gospel message a dream, and then turn round and overflow in praise of Him and in admiration of it? Browning's professor in *Christmas Day* first of all reduces 'the pearl of price' to dust and ashes, and then

'Bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith—if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it.'

And that is very much the tone of not a few very superior persons to-day. But let us have one thing or the other—a Christ who was what He claimed to be, the Incarnate Word of God, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification; or a Galilean peasant who was either a visionary or an impostor, like Judas of Galilee and Theudas.

III. Here is success turned into a criterion of truth.

It is such, no doubt, in the long run, but not till then, and so till the end it is utterly false to argue that a thing is true because multitudes think it to be so. The very opposite is more nearly true. It is usually minorities who have been right.

Gamaliel laid down an immoral principle, which is only too popular to-day, in relation to religion and to much else.

IV. Here is a selfish neutrality pretending to be judicial calmness.

Even if it were true that success is a criterion, we have to help God to ensure the success of His truth. No doubt, taking sides is very inconvenient to a cool, tolerant man of the world. And it is difficult to be in a party without becoming a partisan. We know all the beauty of mild, tolerant wisdom, and that truth is usually shared between combatants, but the dangers of extremes and exaggeration must be faced, and perhaps these are better than the cool indifference of the eclectic, sitting apart, holding no form of creed, but contemplating all. It is not good for a man to stand aloof when his brethren are fighting.

In every age some great causes which are God's are

pressing for decision. In many of them we may be disqualified for taking sides. But feel that you are bound to cast your influence on the side which conscience approves, and bound to settle which side that is. Deborah's fierce curse against Meroz because its people came not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty was deserved.

But the region in which such judicial calmness, which shrinks from taking its side, is most fatal and sadly common, is in regard to our own individual relation to Jesus, and in regard to the establishment of His kingdom among men.

'He that is not with Me is against Me.' Neutrality is opposition. Not to gather with Him is to scatter. Not to choose Him is to reject Him.

Gamaliel had a strange notion of what constituted 'refraining from these men and letting them alone,' and he betrayed his real position and opposition by his final counsel to scourge them, before letting them go. That is what the world's neutrality comes to.

How poor a figure this politic ecclesiastic, mostly anxious not to commit himself, ready to let whoever would risk a struggle with Rome, so that he kept out of the fray and survived to profit by it, cuts beside the disciples, who had chosen their side, had done with 'ifs,' and went away from the Council rejoicing 'that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name'! Who would not rather be Peter or John with their bleeding backs than Gamaliel, sitting soft in his presidential chair, and too cautious to commit himself to an opinion whether the name of Jesus was that of a prophet or a pretender?

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

'Men . . . full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' . . . 'A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. . . . 'Stephen, full of faith and power.'—ACTS vi. 3, 5, 8,

I HAVE taken the liberty of wrenching these three fragments from their context, because of their remarkable parallelism, which is evidently intended to set us thinking of the connection of the various characteristics which they set forth. The first of them is a description, given by the Apostles, of the sort of man whom they conceived to be fit to look after the very homely matter of stifling the discontent of some members of the Church, who thought that their poor people did not get their fair share of the daily ministration. The second and third of them are parts of the description of the foremost of these seven men, the martyr Stephen. In regard to the first and second of our three fragmentary texts, you will observe that the cause is put first and the effect second. The 'deacons' were to be men 'full of the Holy Ghost,' and that would make them 'full of wisdom.' Stephen was 'full of faith,' and that made him 'full of the Holy Ghost.' Probably the same relation subsists in the third of our texts, of which the true reading is not, as it appears in our Authorised Version, 'full of faith and power,' but as it is given in the Revised Version, 'full of grace and power.' He was filled with grace—by which apparently is here meant the sum of the divine spiritual gifts—and therefore he was full of power. Whether that is so or not, if we link these three passages together, as I have taken the liberty of doing, we get a point of view appropriate for such a day¹ as this, when all

¹ Preached on Whit Sunday.

that calls itself Christendom is commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit, and His abiding influence upon the Church. So I simply wish to gather together the principles that come out of these three verses thus concatenated.

I. We may all, if we will, be full of the Holy Spirit.

If there is a God at all, there is nothing more reasonable than to suppose that He can come into direct contact with the spirits of the men whom He has made. And if that Almighty God is not an Almighty indifference, or a pure devil—if He is love—then there is nothing more certain than that, if He can touch and influence men's hearts towards goodness and His own likeness, He most certainly will.

The probability, which all religion recognises, and in often crude forms tries to set forth, and by superstitious acts to secure, is raised to an absolute certainty, if we believe that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Truth, speaks truth to us about this matter. For there is nothing more certain than that the characteristic which distinguishes Him from all other teachers, is to be found not only in the fact that He did something for us on the Cross, as well as taught us by His word; but that in His teaching He puts in the forefront, not the prescriptions of our duty, but the promise of God's gift; and ever says to us, 'Open your hearts and the divine influences will flow in and fill you and fit you for all goodness.' The Spirit of God fills the human spirit, as the mysterious influence which we call life permeates and animates the whole body, or as water lies in a cup.

Consider how that metaphor is caught up, and from a different point of view is confirmed, in regard to the completeness which it predicates, by other metaphors

of Scripture. What is the meaning of the Baptist's saying, 'He shall baptise you in the Holy Ghost and fire'? Does that not mean a complete immersion in, and submersion under, the cleansing flood? What is the meaning of the Master's own saying, 'Tarry ye . . . till ye be clothed with power from on high'? Does not that mean complete investiture of our nakedness with that heavenly-woven robe? Do not all these emblems declare to us the possibility of a human spirit being charged to the limits of its capacity with a divine influence?

We do not here discuss questions which separate good Christian people from one another in regard of this matter. My object now is not to lay down theological propositions, but to urge upon Christian men the acquirement of an experience which is possible for them. And so, without caring to enter by argument on controversial matters, I desire simply to lay emphasis upon the plain implication of that word, '*filled* with the Holy Ghost.' Does it mean less than the complete subjugation of a man's spirit by the influence of God's Spirit brooding upon him, as the prophet laid himself on the dead child, lip to lip, face to face, beating heart to still heart, limb to limb, and so diffused a supernatural life into the dead? That is an emblem of what all you Christian people may have if you like, and if you will adopt the discipline and observe the conditions which God has plainly laid down.

That fulness will be a growing fulness, for our spirits are capable, if not of infinite, at any rate of indefinite, expansion, and there is no limit known to us, and no limit, I suppose, which will ever be reached, so that we can go no further—to the possible growth of a created spirit that is in touch with God, and is having itself

enlarged and elevated and ennobled by that contact. The vessel is elastic, the walls of the cup of our spirit, into which the new wine of the divine Spirit is poured, widen out as the draught is poured into them. The more a man possesses and uses of the life of God, the more is he capable of possessing and the more he will receive. So a continuous expansion in capacity, and a continuous increase in the amount of the divine life possessed, are held out as the happy prerogative and possibility of a Christian soul.

This Stephen had but a very small amount of the clear Christian knowledge that you and I have, but he was leagues ahead of most Christian people in regard to this, that he was 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' Brethren, you can have as much of that Spirit as you want. It is my own fault if my Christian life is not what the Christian lives of some of us, I doubt not, are. 'Filled with the Holy Spirit'! rather a little drop in the bottom of the cup, and all the rest gaping emptiness; rather the fire died down, Pentecostal fire though it be, until there is scarcely anything but a heap of black cinders and grey ashes in your grate, and a little sandwich of flickering flame in one corner; rather the rushing mighty wind died down into all but a dead calm, like that which afflicts sailing-ships in the equatorial regions, when the thick air is deadly still, and the empty sails have not strength even to flap upon the masts; rather the 'river of the water of life' that pours 'out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb,' dried up into a dribble.

That is the condition of many Christian people. I say not of which of us. Let each man settle for himself how that may be. At all events here is the possibility, which may be realised with increasing completeness all

through a Christian man's life. We may be filled with the Holy Spirit.

II. If we are 'full of faith' we shall be filled with the Spirit.

That is the condition as suggested by one of our texts — 'a man full of faith,' and therefore 'of the Holy Ghost.' Now, of course, I believe, as I suppose all people who have made any experience of their own hearts must believe, that before a soul exercises confidence in Jesus Christ, and passes into the household of faith, there have been playing upon it the influences of that divine Comforter whose first mission is to 'convince the world of sin.' But between such operations as these, which I believe are universally diffused, wheresoever the Word of God and the message of salvation are proclaimed—between such operations as these, and those to which I now refer, whereby the divine Spirit not only operates upon, but dwells in, a man's heart, and not only brings conviction to the world of sin, there is a wide gulf fixed; and for all the hallowing, sanctifying, illuminating and strength-giving operations of that divine Spirit, the pre-requisite condition is our trust. Jesus Christ taught us so, in more than one utterance, and His Apostle, in commenting on one of the most remarkable of His sayings on this subject, says, 'This spake He concerning the Holy Spirit which *they that believed* on Him were to receive.' Faith is the condition of receiving that divine influence. But what kind of faith? Well, let us put away theological words. If you do not believe that there is any such influence to be got, you will not get it. If you do not want it, you will not get it. If you do not expect it, you will not get it. If professing to believe it, and to wish it, and to

look for it, you are behaving yourself in such a way as to show that you do not really desire it, you will never get it. It is all very well to talk about faith as the condition of receiving that divine Spirit. Do not let us lose ourselves in the word, but try to translate the somewhat threadbare expression, which by reason of its familiarity produces little effect upon some of us, and to turn it into non-theological English. It just comes to this,—if we are simply trusting ourselves to Jesus Christ our Lord, and if in that trust we do believe in the possibility of even *our* being filled with the divine Spirit, and if that possibility lights up a leaping flame of desire in our hearts which aspires towards the possession of such a gift, and if belief that our reception of that gift is possible because we trust ourselves to Jesus Christ, and longing that we may receive it, combine to produce the confident expectation that we shall, and if all of these combine to produce conduct which neither quenches nor grieves that divine Guest, then, and only then, shall we indeed be filled with the Spirit.

I know of no other way by which a man can receive God into his heart than by opening his heart for God to come in. I know of no other way by which a man can woo—if I may so say—the Divine Lover to enter into his spirit than by longing that He would come, waiting for His coming, expecting it, and being supremely blessed in the thought that such a union is possible. Faith, that is trust, with its appropriate and necessary sequels of desire and expectation and obedience, is the completing of the electric circuit, and after it the spark is sure to come. It is the opening of the windows, after which sunshine cannot but flood the chamber. It is the stretching out of the hand, and no

man that ever, with love and longing, lifted an empty hand to God, dropped it still empty. And no man who, with penitence for his own act, and trust in the divine act, lifted blood-stained and foul hands to God, ever held them up there without the gory patches melting away, and becoming white as snow. Not 'all the perfumes of Araby' can sweeten those bloody hands. Lift them up to God, and they become pure. Whosoever wishes that he may, and believes that he shall, receive from Christ the fulness of the Spirit, will not be disappointed. Brethren, 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,' shall not 'your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?'

III. Lastly, if we are filled with the Spirit we shall be 'full of wisdom, grace, and power.'

The Apostles seemed to think that it was a very important business to look after a handful of poor widows, and see that they had their fair share in the dispensing of the modest charity of the half-pauper Jerusalem church, when they said that for such a purely secular thing as that a man would need to be 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' Surely, something a little less august might have served their turn to qualify men for such a task! 'Wisdom' here, I suppose, means practical sagacity, common sense, the power of picking out an impostor when she came whining for a dole. Very commonplace virtues!—but the Apostles evidently thought that such everyday operations of the understanding as these were not too secular and commonplace to owe their origin to the communication to men of the fulness of the Holy Spirit.

May we not take a lesson from that, that God's great

influences, when they come into a man, do not concern themselves only with great intellectual problems and the like, but that they will operate to make him more fit to do the most secular and the most trivial things that can be put into his hand to do? The Holy Ghost had to fill Stephen before he could hand out loaves and money to the widows in Jerusalem.

And do you not think that your day's work, and your business perplexities, come under the same category? Perhaps the best way to secure understanding of what we ought to do, in regard to very small and secular matters, is to keep ourselves very near to God, with the windows of our hearts opened towards Jerusalem, that all the guidance and light that can come from Him may come into us. Depend upon it, unless we have God's guidance in the trivialities of life, ninety per cent., ay! and more, of our lives will be without God's guidance; because trivialities make up life. And unless my Father in heaven can guide me about what we, very mistakenly, call 'secular' things, and what we very vulgarly call trivial things, His guidance is not worth much. The Holy Ghost will give you wisdom for to-morrow, and all its little cares, as well as for the higher things, of which I am not going to speak now, because they do not come within my text.

'Full of grace,'—that is a wide word, as I take it. If, by our faith, we have brought into our hearts that divine influence, the Spirit of God does not come empty-handed, but He communicates to us whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever things are fair and honourable, whatsoever things in the eyes of men are worthy to be praised, and by the tongues of men have been called virtue. These things will all be given to us step by step, not without our own diligent

co-operation, by that divine Giver. Effort without faith, and faith without effort, are equally incomplete, and the co-operation of the two is that which is blessed by God.

Then the things which are 'gracious,' that is to say, given by His love, and also gracious in the sense of partaking of the celestial beauty which belongs to all virtue, and to all likeness in character to God, these things will give us a strange, supernatural *power* amongst men. The word is employed in my third text, I presume, in its narrow sense of miracle-working power, but we may fairly widen it to something much more than that. Our Lord once said, when He was speaking about the gift of the Holy Spirit, that there were two stages in its operation. In the first, it availed for the refreshment and the satisfying of the desires of the individual; in the second it became, by the ministration of that individual, a source of blessing to others. He said, 'If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink,' and then, immediately, 'He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' That is to say, whoever lives in touch with God, having that divine Spirit in his heart, will walk amongst men the wielder of an unmistakable power, and will be able to bear witness to God, and move men's hearts, and draw them to goodness and truth. The only power for Christian service is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit. The only power for self-government is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit. The only power which will keep us in the way that leads to life, and will bring us at last to the rest and the reward, is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit.

I am charged to all who hear me now with this

message, Here is a gift offered to you. You cannot pare and batter at your own characters so as to make them what will satisfy your own consciences, still less what will satisfy the just judgment of God; but you can put yourself under the moulding influences of Christ's love. Dear brethren, the one hope for dead humanity, the bones very many and very dry, is that from the four winds there should come the breath of God, and breathe in them, and they shall live, 'an exceeding great army.' Forget all else that I have been saying now, if you like, but take these two sentences to your hearts, and do not rest till they express your own personal experience: If I am to be good I must have God's Spirit within me. If I am to have God's Spirit within me, I must be 'full of faith.'

STEPHEN'S VISION

'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.'—ACTS vii. 56.

I. THE vision of the Son of Man, or the abiding manhood of Jesus.

Stephen's Greek name, and his belonging to the Hellenistic part of the Church, make it probable that he had never seen Jesus during His earthly life. If so, how beautiful that he should thus see and recognise Him! How significant, in any case, is it he should instinctively have taken on his lips that name, 'the Son of Man,' to designate Him whom he saw, through the opened heavens, standing on the right hand of God! We remember that in the same Council-

chamber and before the same court, Jesus had lashed the rulers into a paroxysm of fury by declaring, 'Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power,' and now here is one of His followers, almost, as it were, flinging in their teeth the words which they had called 'blasphemy,' and witnessing that he, at all events, saw their partial fulfilment. They saw only the roof of the chamber, or, if the Council met in the open court of the Temple, the quivering blue of the Syrian sky; but to him the blue was parted, and a brighter light than that of its lustre was flashed upon his inward eye. His words roused them to an even wilder outburst than those of Jesus had set loose, and with yells of fury, and stopping their ears that they might not hear the blasphemy, they flung themselves on him, unresisting, and dragged him to his doom. Their passion is a measure of the preciousness to the Christian consciousness of that which Stephen saw, and said that he saw.

Whatever more the great designation, 'Son of Man,' means, it unmistakably means the embodiment of perfect manhood. Stephen's vision swept into his soul, as on a mighty wave, the fact, overwhelming if it had not been so transcendently strengthening to the sorely bestead prisoner, that the Jesus whom he had trusted unseen, was still the same Jesus that He had been 'in the days of His flesh,' and, with whatever changes, still was 'found in fashion as a man.' He still 'bent on earth a brother's eye.' Whatever He had dropped from Him as He ascended, His manhood had not fallen away, and, whatever changes had taken place in His body so as to fit it for its enthronement in the heavens, all that had knit Him to His humble friends on earth was still His. The bonds that united Him and them had not

been snapped by being stretched to span the distance between the Council-chamber and the right hand of God. His sympathy still continued. All that had won their hearts was still in Him, and every tender remembrance of His love and leading was transformed into the assurance of a present possession. He was still the Son of Man.

We are all too apt to feel as if the manhood of Jesus was now but a memory, and, though our creed affirms the contrary, yet our faith has difficulty in realising the full force and blessedness of its affirmations. For the Resurrection and Ascension seem to remove Him from close contact with us, and sometimes we feel as if we stretch out groping fingers into the dark and find no warm human hand to grasp. His exaltation seems to withdraw Him from our brotherhood, and the cloud, though it is a cloud of glory, sometimes seems to hide Him from our sight. The thickening veil of increasing centuries becomes more and more difficult for faith to pierce. What Stephen saw was not for him only but for us all, and its significance becomes more and more precious as we drift further and further away in time from the days of the life of Jesus on earth. More and more do we need to make very visible to ourselves this vision, and to lay on our hearts the strong consolation of gazing steadfastly into heaven and seeing there the Son of Man. So we shall feel that He is all to us that He was to those who companied with Him here. So shall we be more ready to believe that 'this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as He went,' and that till He come, He is knit to us and we to Him, by the bonds of a common manhood.

II. The vision of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, or the glory of the Man Jesus.

We will not discuss curious questions which may be asked in connection with Stephen's vision, such as whether the glorified humanity of Jesus implies His special presence in a locality; but will rather try to grasp its bearings on topics more directly related to more important matters than dim speculations on points concerning which confident affirmations are sure to be wrong. Whether the representation implies locality or not, it is clear that the deepest meaning of the expression 'the right hand of God,' is the energy of His unlimited power, and that, therefore, the deepest meaning of the expression 'to be at His right hand,' is wielding the might of the divine Omnipotence. The vision is but the visible confirmation of Jesus' words, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth.'

It is to be taken into account that Scripture usually represents the Christ as seated at the right hand of God, and that posture, taken in conjunction with that place, indicates the completion of His work, the majestic calm of His repose, like that creative rest, which did not follow the creative work because the Worker was weary, but because He had fulfilled His ideal. God rested because His work was finished, and was 'very good.' So Jesus sits, because He, too, has finished His work on earth. 'When,' and because 'He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of God.'

Further, that place at the right hand of God certifies that He is the Judge.

Further, it is a blessed vision for His children, as being the sure pledge of their glory.

It is a glorious revelation of the capabilities of sinless human nature.

It makes heaven habitable for us.

‘I go to prepare a place for you.’ An emigrant does not feel a stranger in new country, if his elder brother has gone before him, and waits to meet him when he lands. The presence of Jesus makes that dim, heavenly state, which is so hard to imagine, and from which we often feel that even its glories repel, or, at least, do not attract, home to those who love Him. To be where He is, and to be as He is—that is heaven.

III. The vision of the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, or the ever-ready help of the glorified Jesus.

The divergence of the vision from the usual representation of the attitude of Jesus is not the least precious of its elements. Stephen saw Him ‘standing,’ as if He had risen to His feet to see His servant’s need and was preparing to come to his help.

What a rush of new strength for victorious endurance would flood Stephen’s soul as he beheld his Lord thus, as it were, starting to His feet in eagerness to watch and to succour! He looks down from amid the glory, and His calm repose does not involve passive indifference to His servant’s sufferings. Into it comes full knowledge of all that they bear for Him, and His rest is not the negation of activity on their behalf, but its intensest energy. Just as one of the Gospels ends with a twofold picture, which at first sight seems to draw a sad distinction between the Lord ‘received up into heaven and set down at the right hand of God,’ and His servants left below, who ‘went everywhere, preaching the word,’ but of which the two halves are fused together by the next words, ‘the Lord also working with them,’ so Stephen’s vision brought together the glorified Lord and His servant, and filled the

martyr's soul with the fact that He not only 'worked,' but suffered with those who suffered for His sake.

That vision is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. Jesus knows and shares in all that affects His servants. He stands in the attitude to help, and He wields the power of God. He is, as the prophet puts it, 'the Arm of the Lord,' and the cry, 'Awake, O Arm of the Lord!' is never unanswered. He helps His servants by actually directing the course of Providence for their sakes. He helps by wielding the forces of nature on their behalf. He 'rebukes kings for their sake, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.' He helps by breathing His own life and strength into them. He helps by disclosing to them the vision of Himself. He helps even when, like Stephen, they are apparently left to the murderous hate of their enemies, for what better help could any of His followers get from Him than that He should, as Stephen prayed that He would, receive their spirit, and 'so give His beloved sleep'? Blessed they whose lives are lighted by that Vision, and whose deaths are such a falling on sleep!

THE YOUNG SAUL AND THE AGED PAUL¹

'... the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.'—ACTS vii. 58.

'... Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.'—PHILEMON 9.

A FAR greater difference than that which was measured by years separated the young Saul from the aged Paul. By years, indeed, the difference was, perhaps, not so great as the words might suggest, for Jewish

¹ To the young.

usage extended the term of youth further than we do, and began age sooner. No doubt, too, Paul's life had aged him fast, and probably there were not thirty years between the two periods. But the difference between him and himself at the beginning and the end of his career was a gulf; and his life was not evolution, but revolution.

At the beginning you see a brilliant young Pharisee, Gamaliel's promising pupil, advanced above many who were his equals in his own religion, as he says himself; living after its straitest sect, and eager to have the smallest part in what seemed to him the righteous slaying of one of the followers of the blaspheming Nazarene. At the end he was himself one of these followers. He had cast off, as folly, the wisdom which took him so much pains to acquire. He had turned his back upon all the brilliant prospects of distinction which were opening to him. He had broken with countrymen and kindred. And what had he made of it? He had been persecuted, hunted, assailed by every weapon that his old companions could fashion or wield; he is a solitary man, laden with many cares, and accustomed to look perils and death in the face; he is a prisoner, and in a year or two more he will be a martyr. If he were an apostate and a renegade, it was not for what he could get by it.

What made the change? The vision of Jesus Christ. If we think of the transformation on Saul, its causes and its outcome, we shall get lessons which I would fain press upon your hearts now. Do you wonder that I would urge on you just such a life as that of this man as your highest good?

I. I would note, then, first, that faith in Jesus Christ will transform and ennoble any life.

It has been customary of late years, amongst people who do not like miracles, and do not believe in sudden changes of character, to allege that Paul's conversion was but the appearance, on the surface, of an underground process that had been going on ever since he kept the witnesses' clothes. Modern critics know a great deal more about the history of Paul's conversion than Paul did. For to him there was no consciousness of undermining, but the change was instantaneous. He left Jerusalem a bitter persecutor, exceeding mad against the followers of the Nazarene, thinking that Jesus was a blasphemer and an impostor, and His disciples pestilent vermin, to be harried off the face of the earth. He entered Damascus a lowly disciple of that Christ. His conversion was not an underground process that had been silently sapping the foundations of his life; it was an explosion. And what caused it? What was it that came on that day on the Damascus road, amid the blinding sunshine of an Eastern noontide? The vision of Jesus Christ. An overwhelming conviction flooded his soul that He whom he had taken to be an impostor, richly deserving the Cross that He endured, was living in glory, and was revealing Himself to Saul then and there. That truth crumbled his whole past into nothing; and he stood there trembling and astonished, like a man the ruins of whose house have fallen about his ears. He bowed himself to the vision. He surrendered at discretion without a struggle. 'Immediately,' says he, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,' and when he said 'Lord, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' he flung open the gates of the fortress for the Conqueror to come in. The vision of Christ reversed his judgments, transformed his character, revolutionised his life.

That initial impulse operated through all the rest of his career. Hearken to him: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. To me to live is Christ. Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Living or dying, we are the Lord's.' 'We labour that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.' The transforming agency was the vision of Christ, and the bowing of the man's whole nature before the seen Saviour.

Need I recall to you how noble a life issued from that fountain? I am sure that I need do no more than mention in a word or two the wondrous activity, flashing like a flame of fire from East to West, and everywhere kindling answering flames, the noble self-oblivion, the continual communion with God and the Unseen, and all the other great virtues and nobleness which came from such sources as these. I need only, I am sure, remind you of them, and draw this lesson, that the secret of a transforming and noble life is to be found in faith in Jesus Christ. The vision that changed Paul is as available for you and me. For it is all a mistake to suppose that the essence of it is the miraculous appearance that flashed upon the Apostle's eyes. He speaks of it himself, in other language, when he says, 'It pleased God to reveal His Son *in* me.' And that revelation in all its fulness, in all its sweetness, in all its transforming and ennobling power, is offered to every one of us. For the eye of faith is no less gifted with the power of direct and certain vision—yea! is even more gifted with this—than is the eye of sense. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' Christ is revealed to each one of us as really, as

veritably, and the revelation may become as strong an impulse and motive in our lives as ever it was to the Apostle on the Damascus road. What is wanted is not revelation, but the bowed will—not the heavenly vision, but obedience to the vision. I suppose that most of you think that you believe all that about Jesus Christ, which transformed Gamaliel's pupil into Christ's disciple. And what has it done for you? In many cases, nothing. Be sure of this, dear young friends, that the shortest way to a life adorned with all grace, with all nobility, fragrant with all goodness, and permanent as that life which does the will of God must clearly be, is this, to bow before the seen Christ, seen in His word, and speaking to your hearts, and to take His yoke and carry His burden. Then you will build upon what will stand, and make your days noble and your lives stable. If you build on anything else, the structure will come down with a crash some day, and bury you in its ruins. Surely it is better to learn the worthlessness of a non-Christian life, in the light of His merciful face, when there is yet time to change our course, than to see it by the fierce light of the great White Throne set for judgment. We must each of us learn it here or there.

II. Faith in Christ will make a joyful life, whatever its circumstances.

I have said that, judged by the standard of the Exchange, or by any of the standards which men usually apply to success in life, this life of the Apostle was a failure. We know, without my dwelling more largely upon it, what he gave up. We know what, to outward appearance, he gained by his Christianity. You remember, perhaps, how he himself speaks about the external aspects of his life in one place, where he

says, 'Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and as the offscouring of all things unto this day.'

That was one side of it. Was that all? This man had that within him which enabled him to triumph over all trials. There is nothing more remarkable about him than the undaunted courage, the unimpaired elasticity of spirit, the buoyancy of gladness, which bore him high upon the waves of the troubled sea in which he had to swim. If ever there was a man that had a bright light burning within him, in the deepest darkness, it was that little weather-beaten Jew, whose 'bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible.' And what was it that made him master of circumstances, and enabled him to keep sunshine in his heart when winter bound all the world around him? What made this bird sing in a darkened cage? One thing—the continual presence, consciously with Him by faith, of that Christ who had revolutionised his life, and who continued to bless and to gladden it. I have quoted his description of his external condition. Let me quote two or three words that indicate how he took all that sea of troubles and of sorrows that poured its waves and its billows over him. 'In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth also by Christ.' 'For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day

by day.' 'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.' 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.'

There is the secret of blessedness, my friends; there is the fountain of perpetual joy. Cling to Christ, set His will on the throne of your hearts, give the reins of your life and of your character into His keeping, and nothing 'that is at enmity with joy' can either 'abolish or destroy' the calm blessedness of your spirits.

You will have much to suffer; you will have something to give up. Your life may look, to men whose tastes have been vulgarised by the glaring brightnesses of this vulgar world, but grey and sombre, but it will have in it the calm abiding blessedness which is more than joy, and is diviner and more precious than the tumultuous transports of gratified sense or successful ambition. Christ is peace, and He gives His peace to us; and then He gives a joy which does not break but enhances peace. We are all tempted to look for our gladness in creatures, each of which satisfies but a part of our desire. But no man can be truly blessed who has to find many contributories to make up his blessedness. That which makes us rich must be, not a multitude of precious stones, howsoever precious they may be, but one Pearl of great price; the one Christ who is our only joy. And He says to us that He gives us Himself, if we behold Him and bow to Him, that His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full, while all other gladnesses are partial

and transitory. Faith in Christ makes life blessed. The writer of Ecclesiastes asked the question which the world has been asking ever since: 'Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of this vain life which he passeth as a shadow?' You young people are asking, 'Who will show us any good?' Here is the answer—Faith in Christ and obedience to Him; that is the good part which no man taketh from us. Dear young friend, have you made it yours?

III. Faith in Christ produces a life which bears being looked back upon.

In a later Epistle than that from which my second text is taken, we get one of the most lovely pictures that was ever drawn, albeit it is unconsciously drawn, of a calm old age, very near the gate of death; and looking back with a quiet heart over all the path of life. I am not going to preach to you, dear friends, in the flush of your early youth, a gospel which is only to be recommended because it is good to die by, but it will do even you, at the beginning, no harm to realise for a moment that the end will come, and that retrospect will take the place in your lives which hope and anticipation fill now. And I ask you what you expect to feel and say then?

What did Paul say? 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' He was not self-righteous; but it is possible to have lived a life which, as the world begins to fade, vindicates itself as having been absolutely right in its main trend, and to feel that the dawning light of Eternity confirms the choice that we made. And I pray you to ask yourselves, 'Is my life of that sort?'

How much of it would bear the scrutiny which will have to come, and which in Paul's case was so quiet and calm? He had had a stormy day, many a thunder-cloud had darkened the sky, many a tempest had swept across the plain; but now, as the evening draws on, the whole West is filled with a calm amber light, and all across the plain, right away to the grey East, he sees that he has been led by, and has been willing to walk in, the right way to the 'City of habitation.' Would that be your experience if the last moment came now?

There will be, for the best of us, much sense of failure and shortcoming when we look back on our lives. But whilst some of us will have to say, 'I have played the fool and erred exceedingly,' it is possible for each of us to lay himself down in peace and sleep, awaiting a glorious rising again and a crown of righteousness.

Dear young friends, it is for you to choose whether your past, when you summon it up before you, will look like a wasted wilderness, or like a garden of the Lord. And though, as I have said, there will always be much sense of failure and shortcoming, yet that need not disturb the calm retrospect; for whilst memory sees the sins, faith can grasp the Saviour, and quietly take leave of life, saying, 'I know in whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.'

So I press upon you all this one truth, that faith in Jesus Christ will transform, will ennoble, will make joyous your lives whilst you live, and will give you a quiet heart in the retrospect when you come to die. Begin right, dear young friends. You will never find it so easy to take any decisive step, and most of all

this chiefest step, as you do to-day. You will get less and less flexible as you get older. You will get set in your ways. Habits will twine their tendrils round you, and hinder your free movement. The truth of the Gospel will become commonplace by familiarity. Associations and companions will have more and more power over you; and you will be stiffened as an old tree-trunk is stiffened. You cannot count on to-morrow; be wise to-day. Begin this year aright. Why should you not now see the Christ and welcome Him? I pray that every one of us may behold Him and fall before Him with the cry, 'Lord! what wilt Thou have me to do?'

THE DEATH OF THE MASTER AND THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT

'And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And, when he had said this, he fell asleep.'—ACTS vii. 59, 60.

THIS is the only narrative in the New Testament of a Christian martyrdom or death. As a rule, Scripture is supremely indifferent to what becomes of the people with whom it is for a time concerned. As long as the man is the organ of the divine Spirit he is somewhat; as soon as that ceases to speak through him he drops into insignificance. So this same Acts of the Apostles—if I may so say—kills off James the brother of John in a parenthesis; and his is the only other martyrdom that it concerns itself even so much as to mention.

Why, then, this exceptional detail about the martyrdom of Stephen? For two reasons: because it is the first of a series, and the Acts of the Apostles always

dilates upon the first of each set of things which it describes, and condenses about the others. But more especially, I think, because if we come to look at the story, it is not so much an account of Stephen's death as of Christ's power in Stephen's death. And the theme of this book is not the acts of the Apostles, but the acts of the risen Lord, in and for His Church.

There is no doubt but that this narrative is modelled upon the story of our Lord's Crucifixion, and the two incidents, in their similarities and in their differences, throw a flood of light upon one another.

I shall therefore look at our subject now with constant reference to that other greater death upon which it is based. It is to be observed that the two sayings on the lips of the proto-martyr Stephen are recorded for us in their original form on the lips of Christ, in *Luke's* Gospel, which makes a still further link of connection between the two narratives.

So, then, my purpose now is merely to take this incident as it lies before us, to trace in it the analogies and the differences between the death of the Master and the death of the servant, and to draw from it some thoughts as to what it is possible for a Christian's death to become, when Christ's presence is felt in it.

I. Consider, in general terms, this death as the last act of imitation to Christ.

The resemblance between our Lord's last moments and Stephen's has been thought to have been the work of the narrator, and, consequently, to cast some suspicion upon the veracity of the narrative. I accept the correspondence, I believe it was intentional, but I shift the intention from the writer to the actor, and I ask why it should not have been that the dying martyr

should consciously, and of set purpose, have made his death conformable to his Master's death? Why should not the dying martyr have sought to put himself (as the legend tells one of the other Apostles in outward form sought to do) in Christ's attitude, and to die as He died?

Remember, that in all probability Stephen died on Calvary. It was the ordinary place of execution, and, as many of you may know, recent investigations have led many to conclude that a little rounded knoll outside the city wall—not a 'green hill,' but still 'outside a city wall,' and which still bears a lingering tradition of connection with Him—was probably the site of that stupendous event. It was the place of stoning, or of public execution, and there in all probability, on the very ground where Christ's Cross was fixed, His first martyr saw 'the heavens opened and Christ standing on the right hand of God.' - If these were the associations of the place, what more natural, and even if they were not, what more natural, than that the martyr's death should be shaped after his Lord's?

Is it not one of the great blessings, in some sense the greatest of the blessings, which we owe to the Gospel, that in that awful solitude where no other example is of any use to us, His pattern may still gleam before us? Is it not something to feel that as life reaches its highest, most poignant and exquisite delight and beauty in the measure in which it is made an imitation of Jesus, so for each of us death may lose its most poignant and exquisite sting and sorrow, and become something almost sweet, if it be shaped after the pattern and by the power of His? We travel over a lonely waste at last. All clasped hands are unclasped;

and we set out on the solitary, though it be 'the common, road into the great darkness.' But, blessed be His Name! 'the Breaker is gone up before us,' and across the waste there are footprints that we

'Seeing, may take heart again.'

The very climax and apex of the Christian imitation of Christ may be that we shall bear the image of His death, and be like Him then.

Is it not a strange thing that generations of martyrs have gone to the stake with their hearts calm and their spirits made constant by the remembrance of that Calvary where Jesus died with more of trembling reluctance, shrinking, and apparent bewildered unmanning than many of the weakest of His followers? Is it not a strange thing that the death which has thus been the source of composure, and strength, and heroism to thousands, and has lost none of its power of being so to-day, was the death of a Man who shrank from the bitter cup, and that cried in that mysterious darkness, 'My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

Dear brethren, unless with one explanation of the reason for His shrinking and agony, Christ's death is less heroic than that of some other martyrs, who yet drew all their courage from Him.

How come there to be in Him, at one moment, calmness unmoved, and heroic self-oblivion, and at the next, agony, and all but despair? I know only one explanation, 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' And when He died, shrinking and trembling, and feeling bewildered and forsaken, it was your sins and mine that weighed Him down. The servant whose death was conformed to his Master's had none of these experiences because he was only a martyr.

The Lord had them, because He was the Sacrifice for the whole world.

II. We have here, next, a Christian's death as being the voluntary entrusting of the spirit to Christ.

'They stoned Stephen.' Now, our ordinary English idea of the manner of the Jewish punishment of stoning, is a very inadequate and mistaken one. It did not consist merely in a miscellaneous rabble throwing stones at the criminal, but there was a solemn and appointed method of execution which is preserved for us in detail in the Rabbinical books. And from it we gather that the *modus operandi* was this. The blasphemer was taken to a certain precipitous rock, the height of which was prescribed as being equal to that of two men. The witnesses by whose testimony he had been condemned had to cast him over, and if he survived the fall it was their task to roll upon him a great stone, of which the weight is prescribed in the Talmud as being as much as two men could lift. If he lived after that, then others took part in the punishment.

Now, at some point in that ghastly tragedy, probably, we may suppose as they were hurling him over the rock, the martyr lifts his voice in this prayer of our text.

As they were stoning him he 'called upon'—not *God*, as our Authorised Version has supplied the wanting word, but, as is obvious from the context and from the remembrance of the vision, and from the language of the following supplication, 'called upon *Jesus*, saying, Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.'

I do not dwell at any length upon the fact that here we have a distinct instance of prayer to Jesus Christ, a distinct recognition, in the early days of His Church, of the highest conceptions of His person and nature, so

as that a dying man turns to Him, and commits his soul into His hands. Passing this by, I ask you to think of the resemblance, and the difference, between this intrusting of the spirit by Stephen to his Lord, and the committing of His spirit to the Father by His dying Son. Christ on the Cross speaks to God; Stephen, on Calvary, speaks, as I suppose, to Jesus Christ. Christ, on the Cross, says, 'I commit.' Stephen says, 'Receive,' or rather, 'Take.' The one phrase carries in it something of the notion that our Lord died not because He must, but because He would; that He was active in His death; that He chose to summon death to do its work upon Him; that He 'yielded up His spirit,' as one of the Evangelists has it, pregnantly and significantly. But Stephen says, 'Take!' as knowing that it must be his Lord's power that should draw his spirit out of the coil of horror around him. So the one dying word has strangely compacted in it authority and submission; and the other dying word is the word of a simple waiting servant. The Christ says, 'I commit.' 'I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again.' Stephen says, 'Take my spirit,' as longing to be away from the weariness and the sorrow and the pain and all the hell of hatred that was seething and boiling round about him, but yet knowing that he had to wait the Master's will.

So from the language I gather large truths, truths which unquestionably were not present to the mind of the dying man, but are all the more conspicuous because they were unconsciously expressed by him, as to the resemblance and the difference between the death of the martyr, done to death by cruel hands, and the death of the atoning Sacrifice who gave Himself up to die for our sins.

Here we have, in this dying cry, the recognition of Christ as the Lord of life and death. Here we have the voluntary and submissive surrender of the spirit to Him. So, in a very real sense, the martyr's death becomes a sacrifice, and he too dies not merely because he must, but he accepts the necessity, and finds blessedness in it. We need not be passive in death; we need not, when it comes to our turn to die, cling desperately to the last vanishing skirts of life. We may yield up our being, and pour it out as a libation; as the Apostle has it, 'If I be offered as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice of your faith, I joy and rejoice.' Oh! brethren, to die *like* Christ, to die yielding oneself to Him!

And then in these words there is further contained the thought coming gleaming out like a flash of light into some murky landscape—of passing into perennial union with Him. 'Take my spirit,' says the dying man; 'that is all I want. I see Thee standing at the right hand. For what hast Thou started to Thy feet, from the eternal repose of Thy session at the right hand of God the Father Almighty? To help and succour me. And dost Thou succour me when Thou dost let these cruel hands cast me from the rock and bruise me with heavy stones? Yes, Thou dost. For the highest form of Thy help is to take my spirit, and to let me be with Thee.'

Christ delivers His servant from death when He leads the servant into and through death. Brothers, can you look forward thus, and trust yourselves, living or dying, to that Master who is near us amidst the coil of human troubles and sorrows, and sweetly draws our spirits, as a mother her child to her bosom, into His own arms when He sends us death? Is that what it will be to you?

III. Then, still further, there are other words here which remind us of the final triumph of an all-for-bearing charity.

Stephen had been cast from the rock, had been struck with the heavy stone. Bruised and wounded by it, he strangely survives, strangely somehow or other struggles to his knees even though desperately wounded, and, gathering all his powers together at the impulse of an undying love, prays his last words and cries, 'Lord Jesus! Lay not this sin to their charge!'

It is an echo, as I have been saying, of other words, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' An echo, and yet an independent tone! The one cries 'Father!' the other invokes the 'Lord.' The one says, 'They know not what they do'; the other never thinks of reading men's motives, of apportioning their criminality, of discovering the secrets of their hearts. It was fitting that the Christ, before whom all these blind instruments of a mighty design stood patent and naked to their deepest depths, should say, 'They know not what they do.' It would have been unfitting that the servant, who knew no more of his fellows' heart than could be guessed from their actions, should have offered such a plea in his prayer for their forgiveness.

In the very humiliation of the Cross, Christ speaks as knowing the hidden depths of men's souls, and therefore fitted to be their Judge, and now His servant's prayer is addressed to Him as actually being so.

Somehow or other, within a very few years of the time when our Lord dies, the Church has come to the distinctest recognition of *His* Divinity to whom the martyr prays; to the distinctest recognition of *Him* as the Lord of life and death whom the martyr asks to take his

spirit, and to the clearest perception of the fact that He is the Judge of the whole earth by whose acquittal men shall be acquitted, and by whose condemnation they shall be condemned.

Stephen knew that Christ was the Judge. He knew that in two minutes he would be standing at Christ's judgment bar. His prayer was not, 'Lay not my sins to my charge,' but 'Lay not this sin to their charge.' Why did he not ask forgiveness for himself? Why was he not thinking about the judgment that he was going to meet so soon? He had done all that long ago. He had no fear about that judgment for himself, and so when the last hour struck, he was at leisure of heart and mind to pray for his persecutors, and to think of his Judge without a tremor. Are you? If you were as near the edge as Stephen was, would it be wise for you to be interceding for other people's forgiveness? The answer to that question is the answer to this other one,—have you sought your pardon already, and got it at the hands of Jesus Christ?

IV. One word is all that I need say about the last point of analogy and contrast here—the serene passage into rest: 'When he had said this he fell asleep.'

The New Testament scarcely ever speaks of a Christian's death as death but as sleep, and with other similar phrases. But that expression, familiar and all but universal as it is in the Epistles, in reference to the death of believers, is never in a single instance employed in reference to the death of Jesus Christ. He did die that you and I may live. His death was death indeed—He endured not merely the physical fact, but that which is its sting, the consciousness of sin. And He died that the sting might be blunted, and all its poison exhausted upon Him. So the ugly

thing is sleeked and smoothed; and the foul form changes into the sweet semblance of a sleep-bringing angel. Death is gone. The physical fact remains, but all the misery of it, the essential bitterness and the poison of it is all sucked out of it, and it is turned into 'he fell asleep,' as a tired child on its mother's lap, as a weary man after long toil.

'Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.'

Death is but sleep now, because Christ has died, and that sleep is restful, conscious, perfect life.

Look at these two pictures, the agony of the one, the calm triumph of the other, and see that the martyr's falling asleep was possible because the Christ had died before. And do you commit the keeping of your souls to Him now, by true faith; and then, living you may have Him with you, and, dying, a vision of His presence bending down to succour and to save, and when you are dead, a life of rest conjoined with intensest activity. To sleep in Jesus is to awake in His likeness, and to be satisfied.

SEED SCATTERED AND TAKING ROOT

'And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles. 2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. 4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. 5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8. And there was great joy in that

city. 9. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. 14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.—ACTS viii. 1-17.

THE note of time in verse 1 is probably to be rendered as in the Revised Version, 'on that day.' The appetite for blood roused by Stephen's martyrdom at once sought for further victims. Thus far the persecutors had been the rulers, and the persecuted the Church's leaders; but now the populace are the hunters, and the whole Church the prey. The change marks an epoch. Luke does not care to make much of the persecution, which is important to him chiefly for its bearing on the spread of the Church's message. It helped to diffuse the Gospel, and that is why he tells of it. But before proceeding to narrate how it did so, he gives us a picture of things as they stood at the beginning of the assault.

Three points are noted: the flight of the Church except the Apostles, the funeral of Stephen, and Saul's eager search for the disciples. We need not press 'all,' as if it were to be taken with mathematical accuracy. Some others besides the Apostles may have remained, but the community was broken up. They fled, as Christ had bid them do, if persecuted in one city. Brave faithfulness goes with prudent self-preservation, and a valuable 'part of valour is discretion.' But the disciples who fled were not necessarily less courageous than the Apostles who remained, nor were the latter

less prudent than the brethren who fled. For *noblesse oblige*; high position demands high virtues, and the officers should be the last to leave a wreck. The Apostles, no doubt, felt it right to hold together, and preserve a centre to which the others might return when the storm had blown itself out.

In remarkable contrast with the scattering Church are the 'devout men' who reverently buried the martyr. They were not disciples, but probably Hellenistic Jews (Acts ii. 5); perhaps from the synagogue whose members had disputed with Stephen and had dragged him to the council. His words or death may have touched them, as many a time the martyr's fire has lighted others to the martyr's faith. Stephen was like Jesus in his burial by non-disciples, as he had been in his death.

The eager zeal of the young Pharisee brought new severity into the persecution, in his hunting out his victims in their homes, and in his including women among his prisoners. There is nothing so cruel as so-called religious zeal. So Luke lifts the curtain for a moment, and in that glimpse of the whirling tumult of the city we see the three classes, of the brave and prudent disciples, ready to flee or to stand and suffer as duty called; the good men who shrunk from complicity with a bloodthirsty mob, and were stirred to sympathy with his victims; and the zealot, who with headlong rage hated his brother for the love of God. But the curtain drops, and Luke turns to his true theme. He picks up the threads again in verse 4, telling of the dispersal of the disciples, with the significant addition of their occupation when scattered,—'preaching the word.'

The violent hand of the persecutor acted as the

scattering hand of the sower. It flung the seeds broadcast, and wherever they fell they sprouted. These fugitives were not officials, nor were they commissioned by the Apostles to preach. Without any special command or position, they followed the instincts of believing hearts, and, as they carried their faith with them, they spoke of it wherever they found themselves. A Christian will be impelled to speak of Christ if his personal hold of Him is vital. He should need no ecclesiastical authorisation for that. It is not every believer's duty to get into a pulpit, but it is his duty to 'preach Christ.' The scattering of the disciples was meant by men to put out the fire, but, by Christ, to spread it. A volcanic explosion flings burning matter over a wide area.

Luke takes up one of the lines of expansion, in his narrative of Philip's doings in Samaria, which he puts first because Jesus had indicated Samaria first among the regions beyond Judæa (i. 8). Philip's name comes second in the list of deacons (vi. 5), probably in anticipation of his work in Samaria. How unlike the forecast by the Apostles was the actual course of things! They had destined the seven for purely 'secular' work, and regarded preaching the word as their own special engagement. But Stephen saw and proclaimed more clearly than they did the passing away of Temple and ritual; and Philip, on his own initiative, and apparently quite unconscious of the great stride forward that he was taking, was the first to carry the gospel torch into the regions beyond. The Church made Philip a 'deacon,' but Christ made him an 'evangelist'; and an evangelist he continued, long after he had ceased to be a deacon in Jerusalem (xxi. 8).

Observe, too, that, as soon as Stephen is taken away,

Philip rises up to take his place. The noble army of witnesses never wants recruits. Its Captain sends men to the front in unbroken succession, and they are willing to occupy posts of danger because He bids them. Probably Philip fled to Samaria for convenience' sake, but, being there, he probably recalled Christ's instructions in chapter i. 8, repealing His prohibition in Matthew x. 5. What a different world it would be, if it was true of Christians now that they 'went down into the city of So-and-So and proclaimed Christ'! Many run to and fro, but some of them leave their Christianity at home, or lock it up safely in their travelling trunks.

Jerusalem had just expelled the disciples, and would fain have crushed the Gospel; despised Samaria received it with joy. 'A foolish nation' was setting Israel an example (Deut. xxxii. 21; Rom. x. 19). The Samaritan woman had a more spiritual conception of the Messiah than the run of Jews had, and her countrymen seem to have been ready to receive the word. Is not the faith of our mission converts often a rebuke to us?

But the Gospel met new foes as well as new friends on the new soil. Simon the sorcerer, probably a Jew or a Samaritan, would have been impossible on Jewish ground, but was a characteristic product of that age in the other parts of the Roman empire. Just as, to-day, people who are weary of Christianity are playing with Buddhism, it was fashionable in that day of unrest to trifle with Eastern magic-mongers; and, of course, demand created supply, and where there was a crowd of willing dupes, there soon came to be a crop of profit-seeking deceivers. Very characteristically, the dupes claimed more for the deceiver than he did for himself. He probably could perform some simple

chemical experiments and conjuring tricks, and had a store of what sounded to ignorant people profound teaching about deep mysteries, and gave forth enigmatical utterances about his own greatness. An accomplished charlatan will leave much to be inferred from nods and hints, and his admirers will generally spin even more out of them than he meant. So the Samaritans bettered Simon's 'some great one' into 'that power of God which is called great,' and saw in him some kind of emanation of divinity.

The quack is great till the true teacher comes, and then he dwindles. Simon had a bitter pill to swallow when he saw this new man stealing his audience, and doing things which he, with his sorceries, knew that he only pretended to do. Luke points very clearly to the likeness and difference between Simon and Philip by using the same word ('gave heed') in regard to the Samaritan's attitude to both, while in reference to Philip it was 'the things spoken by' him, and in reference to Simon it was himself to which they attended. The one preached Christ, the other himself; the one 'amazed' with 'sorceries,' the other brought good tidings and hid himself, and his message called, not for stupid, open-mouthed astonishment, but for belief and obedience to the name of Jesus. The whole difference between the religion of Jesus and the superstitions which the world calls religions, is involved in the significant contrast, so inartificially drawn.

'Simon also himself believed.' Probably there was in his action a good deal of swimming with the stream, in the hope of being able to divert it; but, also, he may have been all the more struck by Philip's miracles, because he knew a real one, by reason of his experience of sham ones. At any rate, neither Philip nor

Luke drew a distinction between his belief and that of the Samaritans; and, as in their cases, his baptism followed on his profession of belief. But he seems not to have got beyond the point of wondering at the miracles, as it is emphatically said that he did even after his baptism. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but was more interested in studying Philip to find out how he did the miracles than in listening to his teaching. Such an imperfect belief had no transforming power, and left him the same man as before, as was soon miserably manifest.

The news of Philip's great step forward reached the Apostles by some unrecorded means. It is not stated that Philip reported his action, as if to superiors whose authorisation was necessary. More probably the information filtered through other channels. At all events, sending a deputation was natural, and needs not to be regarded as either a sign of suspicion or an act necessary in order to supplement imperfections inherent in the fact that Philip was not an Apostle. The latter meaning has been read—not to say forced—into the incident; but Luke's language does not support it. It was not because they thought that the Samaritans were not admissible to the full privileges of Christians without Apostolic acts, but because they 'heard that Samaria had received the word,' that the Apostles sent Peter and John.

The Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Ghost—that is, the special gifts, such as those of Pentecost. That fact proves that baptism is not necessarily and inseparably connected with the gift of the Spirit; and chapter x. 44, 47, proves that the Spirit may be given before baptism. As little does this incident prove that the imposition of Apostolic hands was necessary in

order to the impartation of the Spirit. Luke, at any rate, did not think so; for he tells how Ananias' hand laid on the blind Saul conveyed the gift to him. The laying on of hands is a natural, eloquent symbol, but it was no prerogative of the Apostles (Acts x. 17; 1 Tim. iv. 14).

The Apostles came down to Samaria to rejoice in the work which their Lord had commanded, and which had been begun without their help, to welcome the new brethren, to give them further instruction, and to knit closely the bonds of unity between the new converts and the earlier ones. But that they came to bestow spiritual gifts which, without them, could not have been imparted, is imported into, not deduced from, the simple narrative of Luke.

SIMON THE SORCERER

'Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.'—ACTS viii. 21.

THE era of the birth of Christianity was one of fermenting opinion and decaying faith. Then, as now, men's minds were seething and unsettled, and that unrest which is the precursor of great changes in intellectual and spiritual habitudes affected the civilised world. Such a period is ever one of predisposition to superstition. The one true bond which unites God and man being obscured, and to the consciousness of many snapped, men's minds become the prey of visionary terrors. Demand creates supply, and the magician and miracle-worker, the possessor of mysterious ways into the Unknown, is never far off at such a time. Partly

deceived and partly deceiving, he is as sure a sign of the lack of profound religious conviction and of the presence of unsatisfied religious aspirations in men's souls, as the stormy petrel or the floating seaweed is of a tempest on the seas.

So we find the early preachers of Christianity coming into frequent contact with pretenders to magical powers. Sadly enough, they were mostly Jews, who prostituted their clearer knowledge to personal ends, and having tacked on to it some theosophic rubbish which they had learned from Alexandria, or mysticism which had filtered to them from the East, or magic arts from Phrygia, went forth, the only missionaries that Judaism sent out, to bewilder and torture men's minds. What a fall from Israel's destination, and what a lesson for the stewards of the 'oracles of God'!

Of such a sort were Elymas, the sorcerer whom Paul found squatting at the ear of the Roman Governor of Cyprus; the magicians at Ephesus; the vagabond Jews exorcists, who with profitable eclecticism, as they thought, tried to add the name of Jesus as one more spell to their conjurations; and, finally, this Simon the sorcerer. Established in Samaria, he had been juggling and conjuring and seeing visions, and professing to be a great mysterious personality, and had more than permitted the half-heathen Samaritans, who seem to have had more religious susceptibility and less religious knowledge than the Jews, and so were a prepared field for all such pretenders, to think of him as in some sense an incarnation of God, and perhaps to set him up as a rival or caricature of Him who in the neighbouring Judæa was being spoken of as the power of God, God manifest in the flesh.

To the city thus moved comes no Apostle, but a

Christian man who begins to preach, and by miracles and teaching draws many souls to Christ.

The story of Simon Magus in his attitude to the Gospel is a very striking and instructive one. It presents for our purpose now mainly three points to which I proceed to refer.

I. An instance of a wholly unreal, because inoperative, faith.

‘He believed,’ says the narrative, and believing was baptized. It is worth noting, in passing, how the profession of faith without anything more was considered by the Early Church sufficient. But obviously his was no true faith. The event showed that it was not.

What was it which made his faith thus unreal?

It rested wholly on the miracles and signs; he ‘wondered’ when he saw them. Of course, miracles were meant to lead to faith; but if they did not lead on to a deeper sense of one’s own evil and need, and so to a spiritual apprehension, then they were of no use.

The very beginning of the story points to the one bond that unites to God, as being the sense of need and the acceptance with heart and will of the testimony of Jesus Christ. Such a disposition is shown in the Samaritans, who make a contrast with Simon in that they believed Philip *preaching*, while Simon believed him *working miracles*. The true place of miracles is to attract attention, to prepare to listen to the word. They are only introductory. A faith may be founded on them, but, on the other hand, the impressions which they produce may be evanescent. How subordinate then, their place at the most! And the one thing which avails is a living contact of heart and soul with Jesus Christ.

Again, Simon’s belief was purely an affair of the

understanding. We are not to suppose, I think, that he merely believed in Philip as a miracle-worker; he must have had some notion about Philip's Master, and we know that it was belief in Jesus as the Christ that qualified in the Apostolic age for baptism. So it is reasonable to suppose that he had so much of head knowledge. But it was only head knowledge. There was in it no penitence, no self-abandonment, no fruit in holy desires; or in other words, there was no heart. It was credence, but not trust.

Now it does not matter how much or how little you know about Jesus Christ. It does not matter how you have come to that knowledge. It does not matter though you have received Christian ordinances as Simon had. If your faith is not a living power, leading to love and self-surrender, it is really nought. And here, on its earliest conflict with heathen magic, the gospel proclaims by the mouth of the Apostle what is true as to all formalists and nominal Christians: 'Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, *for thy heart is not right.*' One thing only unites to God—a faith which cleanses the heart, a faith which lays hold on Christ with will and conscience, a faith which, resting on penitent acknowledgment of sin, trusts wholly to His great mercy.

II. An instance of the constant tendency to corrupt Christianity with heathen superstition.

The Apostles' bestowal of the Holy Ghost, which was evidently accompanied by visible signs, had excited Simon's desire for so useful an aid to his conjuring, and he offers to buy the power, judging of them by himself, and betraying that what he was ready to buy he was also intending to sell.

The offer to buy has been taken as his great sin.

Surely it was but the outcome of a greater. It was not only what he offered, but what he desired, that was wrong. He wanted that on 'whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.' That preposterous wish was quite as bad as, and was the root of, his absurd offer to bribe Peter. Bribe Peter, indeed! Some of Peter's successors would have been amenable to such considerations, but not the horny-handed fisherman who had once said, 'Silver and gold have I none.'

Peter's answer, especially the words of my text, puts the Christian principle in sharp antagonism to the heathen one.

Simon regards what is sacred and spiritual purely as part of his stock-in-trade, contributing to his prestige. He offers to buy it. And the foundation of all his errors is that he regards spiritual gifts as capable of being received and exercised apart altogether from moral qualifications. He does not think at all of what is involved in the very name, 'the Holy Ghost.'

Now, on the other hand, Peter's answer lays down broadly and sharply the opposite truth, the Christian principle that a heart right in the sight of God is the indispensable qualification for all possession of spiritual power, or of any of the blessings which Jesus gives.

How the heart is made right, and what constitutes righteousness is another matter. That leads to the doctrine of repentance and faith.

The one thing that makes such participation impossible is being and continuing in 'the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity.' Or, to put it into more modern words, all the blessings of the Gospel are a gift of God, and are bestowed only on moral conditions. Faith which leads to love and personal submission to the will of God makes a man a Christian. Therefore,

outward ordinances are only of use as they help a man to that personal act.

Therefore, no other man or body of men can do it for us, or come between us and God.

And in confirmation, notice how Peter here speaks of forgiveness. His words do not sound as if he thought that he held the power of absolution, but he tells Simon to go to God who alone can forgive, and refers Simon's fate to God's mercy.

These tendencies, which Simon expresses so baldly, are in us all, and are continually reappearing. How far much of what calls itself Christianity has drifted from Peter's principle laid down here, that moral and spiritual qualifications are the only ones which avail for securing 'part or lot in the matter' of Christ's gifts received for, and bestowed on, men! How much which really rests on the opposite principle, that these gifts can be imparted by men who are supposed to possess them, apart altogether from the state of heart of the would-be recipient, we see around us to-day! *Simony* is said to be the securing ecclesiastical promotion by purchase. But it is much rather the belief that 'the gift of God can be purchased with' anything but personal faith in Jesus, the Giver and the Gift. The effects of it are patent among us. Ceremonies usurp the place of faith. A priesthood is exalted. The universal Christian prerogative of individual access to God is obscured. Christianity is turned into a kind of magic.

III. An instance of the worthlessness of partial convictions.

Simon was but slightly moved by Peter's stern rebuke. He paid no heed to the exhortation to pray for forgiveness and to repent of his wickedness, but still remained in substantially his old error, in that he

accredited Peter with power, and asked him to pray for him, as if the Apostle's prayer would have some special access to God which his, though he were penitent, could not have. Further, he showed no sense of sin. All that he wished was that 'none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.'

How useless are convictions which go no deeper down than Simon's did!

What became of him we do not know. But there are old ecclesiastical traditions about him which represent him as a bitter enemy in future of the Apostle. And Josephus has a story of a Simon who played a degrading part between Felix and Drusilla, and who is thought by some to have been he. But in any case, we have no reason to believe that he ever followed Peter's counsel or prayed to God for forgiveness. So he stands for us as one more tragic example of a man, once 'not far from the kingdom of God' and drifting ever further away from it, because, at the fateful moment, he would not enter in. It is hard to bring such a man as near again as he once was. Let us learn that the one key which opens the treasury of God's blessings, stored for us all in Jesus, is our own personal faith, and let us beware of shutting our ears and our hearts against the merciful rebukes that convict us of 'this our wickedness,' and point us to the 'Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,' and therefore our sin.

A MEETING IN THE DESERT

'And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28. Was returning, and

sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet. 29. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: 33. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth. 34. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. 40. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.—ACTS viii. 26-40.

PHILIP had no special divine command either to flee to, or to preach in, Samaria, but 'an angel of the Lord,' and afterwards 'the Spirit,' directed him to the Ethiopian statesman. God rewards faithful work with more work. Samaria was a borderland between Jew and Gentile, but in preaching to the eunuch Philip was on entirely Gentile ground. So great a step in advance needed clear command from God to impel to it and to justify it.

I. We have, then, first, the new commission. Philip might well wonder why he should be taken away from successful work in a populous city, and despatched to the lonely road to Gaza. But he obeyed at once. He knew not for what he was sent there, but that ignorance did not trouble or retard him. It should be enough for us to see the next step. 'We walk by faith, not by sight,' for we none of us know what comes of our actions, and we get light as we go. Do to-day's plain duty, and when to-morrow is to-day its duty will be plain too. The river on which we sail winds, and not till we round the nearest bend do we see the course beyond. So we are kept in the peaceful posture of

dependent obedience, and need to hold our communications with God open, that we may be sure of His guidance.

No doubt, as Philip trudged along till he reached the Gaza road, he would have many a thought as to what he was to find there, and, when he came at last to the solitary track, would look eagerly over the uninhabited land for an explanation of his strange and vague instructions. But an obedient heart is not long left perplexed, and he who looks for duty to disclose itself will see it in due time.

II. So we have next the explanation of the errand. Luke's 'Behold!' suggests the sudden sight of the great man's cortege in the distance. No doubt, he travelled with a train of attendants, as became his dignity, and would be conspicuous from afar. Philip, of course, did not know who he was when he caught sight of him, but Luke tells his rank at once, in order to lay stress on it, as well as to bring out the significance of his occupation and subsequent conversion. Here was a full-blooded Gentile, an eunuch, a courtier, who had been drawn to Israel's God, and was studying Israel's prophets as he rode. Perhaps he had chosen that road to Egypt for its quietness. At any rate, his occupation revealed the bent of his mind.

Philip felt that the mystery of his errand was solved now, and he recognised the impulse to break through conventional barriers and address the evidently dignified stranger, as the voice of God's Spirit, and not his own. How he was sure of that we do not know, but the distinction drawn between the former communication by an angel and this from the Spirit points to a clear difference in his experiences, and to careful discrimination in the narrator. The variation is not made at random. Philip did not mistake a buzzing in

his ears from the beating of his own heart for a divine voice. We have here no hallucinations of an enthusiast, but plain fact.

How manifestly the meeting of these two, starting so far apart, and so ignorant of each other and of the purpose of their being thrown together, reveals the unseen hand that moved each on his own line, and brought about the intersection of the two at that exact spot and hour! How came it that at that moment the Ethiopian was reading, of all places in his roll, the very words which make the kernel of the gospel of the evangelical prophet? Surely such 'coincidences' are a hard nut to crack for deniers of a Providence that shapes our ends!

It is further to be noticed that the eunuch's conversion does not appear to have been of importance for the expansion of the Church. It exercised no recorded influence, and was apparently not communicated to the Apostles, as, if it had been, it could scarcely have failed to have been referred to when the analogous case of Cornelius was under discussion. So, divine intervention and human journeying and work were brought into play simply for the sake of one soul which God's eye saw to be ripe for the Gospel. He cares for the individual, and one sheep that can be reclaimed is precious enough in the Shepherd's estimate to move His hand to action and His heart to love. Not because he was a man of great authority at Candace's court, but because he was yearning for light, and ready to follow it when it shone, did the eunuch meet Philip on that quiet road.

III. The two men being thus strangely brought together, we have next the conversation for the sake of which they were brought together. The eunuch was

reading aloud, as people not very much used to books, or who have some difficult passage in hand, often do. Philip must have been struck with astonishment when he caught the, to him, familiar words, and must have seen at once the open door for his preaching. His abrupt question wastes no time with apologies or polite, gradual approaches to his object. Probably the very absence of the signs of deference to which he was accustomed impressed the eunuch with a dim sense of the stranger's authority, which would be deepened by the home-thrust of his question.

The wistful answer not only shows no resentment at the brusque stranger's thrusting himself in, but acknowledges bewilderment, and responds to the undertone of proffered guidance in the question. A teacher has often to teach a pupil his ignorance, to begin with; but it should be so done as to create desire for instruction, and to kindle confidence in him as instructor. It is insolent to ask, 'Understandest thou?' unless the questioner is ready and able to help to understand.

The invitation to a seat in the great man's chariot showed how eagerness to learn had obliterated distinctions of rank, and swiftly knit a new bond between these two, who had never heard of each other five minutes before. A true heart will hail as its best and closest friend him who leads it to know God's mind more clearly. How earthly dignities dwindle when God's messenger lays hold of a soul!

So the chariot rolls on, and through the silence of the desert the voices of these two reach the wondering attendants, as they plod along. The Ethiopian was reading the Septuagint translation of Isaiah, which, though it missed part of the force of the original, brought clearly before him the great figure of a

Sufferer, meek and dumb, swept from the earth by unjust judgment. He understood so much, but what he did not understand was who this great, tragic Figure represented. His question goes to the root of the matter, and is a burning question to-day, as it was all these centuries ago on the road to Gaza. Philip had no doubt of the answer. Jesus was the 'lamb dumb before its shearers.' This is not the place to enter on such wide questions, but we may at least affirm that, whatever advance modern schools have made in the criticism and interpretation of the Old Testament, the very spirit of the whole earlier Revelation is missed if Jesus is not discerned as the Person to whom prophet and ritual pointed, in whom law was fulfilled and history reached its goal.

No doubt much instruction followed. How long they had rode together before they came to 'a certain water' we know not, but it cannot have been more than a few hours. Time is elastic, and when the soil is prepared, and rain and sunlight are poured down, the seed springs up quickly. People who deny the possibility of 'sudden conversions' are blind to facts, because they wear the blinkers of a theory. Not always have they who 'anon with joy receive' the word 'no root in themselves.'

As is well known, the answer to the eunuch's question (v. 37) is wanting in authoritative manuscripts. The insertion may have been due to the creeping into the text of a marginal note. A recent and most original commentator on the Acts (Blass) considers that this, like other remarkable readings found in one set of manuscripts, was written by Luke in a draft of the book, which he afterwards revised and somewhat abbreviated into the form which most of the manuscripts present

However that may be, the required conditions in the doubtful verse are those which the practice of the rest of the Acts shows to have been required. Faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God was the qualification for the baptisms there recorded.

And there was no other qualification. Philip asked nothing about the eunuch's proselytism, or whether he had been circumcised or not. He did not, like Peter with Cornelius, need the evidence of the gift of the Spirit before he baptized; but, notwithstanding his experience of an unworthy candidate in Simon the sorcerer, he unhesitatingly administered baptism. There was no Church present to witness the rite. We do not read that the Holy Ghost fell on the eunuch.

That baptism in the quiet wady by the side of the solitary road, while the swarthy attendants stood in wonder, was a mighty step in advance; and it was taken, not by an Apostle, nor with ecclesiastical sanction, but at the bidding of Christian instinct, which recognised a brother in any man who had faith in Jesus, the Son of God. The new faith is bursting old bonds. The universality of the Gospel is overflowing the banks of Jewish narrowness. Probably Philip was quite unconscious of the revolutionary nature of his act, but it was done, and in it was the seed of many more.

The eunuch had said that he could not understand unless some man guided him. But when Philip is caught away, he does not bewail the loss of his guide. He went on his road with joy, though his new faith might have craved longer support from the crutch of a teacher, and fuller enlightenment. What made him able to do without the guide that a few hours before had been so indispensable? The presence in his heart of a better one, even of Him whom Jesus promised, to

guide His servants into all truth. If those who believe that Scripture without an authorised interpreter is insufficient to lead men aright, would consider the end of this story, they might find that a man's dependence on outward teachers ceases when he has God's Spirit to teach him, and that for such a man the Word of God in his hand and the Spirit of God in his spirit will give him light enough to walk by, so that, in the absence of all outward instructors, he may still be filled with true wisdom, and in absolute solitude may go 'on his way rejoicing.'

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

'But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.'—ACTS viii. 40.

THE little that is known about Philip, the deacon and evangelist, may very soon be told. His name suggests, though by no means conclusively, that he was probably one of the so-called Hellenists, or foreign-born and Greek-speaking Jews. This is made the more probable because he was one of the seven selected by the Church, and after that selection appointed by the Apostles, to dispense relief to the poor. The purpose of the appointment being to conciliate the grumblers in the Hellenist section of the Church, the persons chosen would probably belong to it. He left Jerusalem during the persecution 'that arose after the death of Stephen.' As we know, he was the first preacher of the Gospel in Samaria; he was next the instrument honoured to carry the Word to the first heathen ever gathered into the Church; and then, after a journey along the sea-coast to Cæsarea, the then seat of government, he

remained in that place in obscure toil for twenty years, dropped out of the story, and we hear no more of him but for one glimpse of his home in Cæsarea.

That is all that is told about him. And I think that if we note the contrast of the office to which men called him, and the work to which God set him; and the other still more striking contrast between the brilliancy of the beginning of his course, and the obscurity of his long years of work, we may get some lessons worth the learning. I take, then, not only the words which I read for my text, but the whole of the incidents connected with Philip, as our starting-point now; and I draw from them two or three very well-worn, but none the less needful, pieces of instruction.

I. First, then, we may gather a thought as to Christ's sovereignty in choosing His instruments.

Did you ever notice that events exactly contradicted the intentions of the Church and of the Apostles, in the selection of Philip and his six brethren? The Apostles said, 'It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Pick out seven relieving-officers; men who shall do the secular work of the Church, and look after the poor; and we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.' So said man. And what did facts say? That as to these twelve, who were to 'give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word,' we never hear that by far the larger proportion of them were honoured to do anything worth mentioning for the spread of the Gospel. Their function was to be 'witnesses,' and that was all. But, on the other hand, of the men that were supposed to be fitted for secular work, two at all events had more to do in the expansion of the Church, and in the development of the universal

aspects of Christ's Gospel, than the whole of the original group of Apostles. So Christ picks His instruments. The Apostles may say, 'These shall do so-and-so; and we will do so-and-so.' Christ says, 'Stephen shall proclaim a wider Gospel than the Apostles at first had caught sight of, and Philip shall be the first who will go beyond the charmed circle of Judaism, and preach the Gospel.'

It is always so. Christ chooses His instruments where He will; and it is not the Apostle's business, nor the business of an ecclesiastic of any sort, to settle his own work or anybody else's. The Commander-in-Chief keeps the choosing of the men for special service in His own hand. The Apostolic College said, 'Let them look after the poor, and leave us to look after the ministry of the Word'; Christ says, 'Go and join thyself to that chariot, and speak there the speech that I shall bid thee.'

Brethren, do you listen for that voice calling you to your tasks, and never mind what men may be saying. Wait till *He* bids, and you will hear Him speaking to you if you will keep yourselves quiet. Wait till He bids you, and then be sure that you do it. Christ chooses His instruments, and chooses them often in strange places.

II. The next lesson that I would take from this story is the spontaneous speech of a believing heart.

There came a persecution that scattered the Church. Men tried to fling down the lamp; and all that they did was to spill the oil, and it ran flaming wherever it flowed. For the scattered brethren, without any Apostle with them, with no instruction given to them to do so, wherever they went carried their faith with them; and, as a matter of course, wherever they went they

spoke their faith. And so we read that, not by appointment, nor of set purpose, nor in consequence of any ecclesiastical or official sanction, nor in consequence of any supernatural and distinct commandment from heaven, but just because it was the natural thing to do, and they could not help it, they went everywhere, these scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, preaching the word.

And when this Philip, whom the officials had relegated to the secular work of distributing charity, found himself in Samaria, he did the like. The Samaritans were outcasts, and Peter and John had wanted to bring down fire from heaven to consume them. But Philip could not help speaking out the truth that was in his heart.

So it always will be: we can all talk about what we are interested in. The full heart cannot be condemned to silence. If there is no necessity for speech felt by a professing Christian, that professing Christian's faith is a very superficial thing. 'We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard,' said one of the Apostles, thereby laying down the great charter of freedom of speech for all profound convictions. 'Thy word was as a fire in my bones when I said, I will speak no more in Thy name,' so petulant and self-willed was I, 'and I was weary with forbearing,' and ashamed of my rash vow; 'and I could not stay.'

Dear friends, do you carry with you the impulse for utterance of Christ's name wherever you go? And is it so sweet in your hearts that you cannot but let its sweetness have expression by your lips? Surely, surely this spontaneous instinctive utterance of Philip, by which a loving heart sought to relieve itself, puts to shame the 'dumb dogs' that make up such an

enormous proportion of professing Christians. And surely such an experience as his may well throw a very sinister light on the reality—nay! I will not say the *reality*, that would be too uncharitable—but upon the depth and vitality of the profession of Christianity which these silent ones make.

III. Another lesson that seems to me strikingly illustrated by the story with which we are concerned, is the guidance of a divine hand in common life, and when there are no visible nor supernatural signs.

Philip goes down to Samaria because he must, and speaks because he cannot help it. He is next bidden to take a long journey, from the centre of the land, away down to the southern desert; and at a certain point there the Spirit says to him, 'Go! join thyself to this chariot.' And when his work with the Ethiopian statesman is done, then he is swept away by the power of the Spirit of God, as Ezekiel had been long before by the banks of the river Chebar, and is set down, no doubt all bewildered and breathless, at Azotus—the ancient Ashdod—the Philistine city on the low-lying coast. Was Philip less under Christ's guidance when miracle ceased and he was left to ordinary powers? Did he feel as if deserted by Christ, because, instead of being swept by the strong wind of heaven, he had to tramp wearily along the flat shore with the flashing Mediterranean on his left hand reflecting the hot sunshine? Did it seem to him as if his task in preaching the Gospel in these villages through which he passed on his way to Cæsarea was less distinctly obedience to the divine command than when he heard the utterance of the Spirit, 'Go down to the road which leads to Gaza, which is desert'? By no means. To this man, as to every faithful soul, the guidance

that came through his own judgment and common sense, through the instincts and impulses of his sanctified nature, by the circumstances which he devoutly believed to be God's providence, was as truly direct divine guidance as if all the angels of heaven had blown commandment with their trumpets into his waiting and stunned ears.

And so you and I have to go upon our paths without angel voices, or chariots of storm, and to be contented with divine commandments less audible or perceptible to our senses than this man had at one point in his career. But if we are wise we shall hear Him speaking the word. We shall not be left without His voice if we wait for it, stilling our own inclinations until His solemn commandment is made plain to us, and then stirring up our inclinations that they may sway us to swift obedience. There is no gulf, for the devout heart, between what is called miraculous and what is called ordinary and common. Equally in both does God manifest His will to His servants, and equally in both is His presence perceived by faith. We do not need to envy Philip's brilliant beginning. Let us see that we imitate his quiet close of life.

IV. The last lesson that I would draw is this—the nobility of persistence in unnoticed work.

What a contrast to the triumphs in Samaria, and the other great expansion of the field for the Gospel effected by the God-commanded preaching to the eunuch, is presented by the succeeding twenty years of altogether unrecorded but faithful toil! Persistence in such unnoticed work is made all the more difficult, and to any but a very true man would have been all but impossible, by reason of the contrast which such work offered to the glories of the earlier days. Some

of us may have been tried in a similar fashion, all of us have more or less the same kind of difficulty to face. Some of us perhaps may have had gleams, at the beginning of our career, that seemed to give hope of fields of activity more brilliant and of work far better than we have ever had or done again in the long weary toil of daily life. There may have been abortive promises, at the commencement of your careers, that seemed to say that you would occupy a more conspicuous position than life has had really in reserve for you. At any rate, we have all had our dreams, for

‘ If Nature put not forth her power
About the opening of the flower,
Who is there that could live an hour?’

and no life is all that the liver of it meant it to be when he began. We dream of building palaces or temples, and we have to content ourselves if we can put up some little shed in which we may shelter.

Philip, who began so conspicuously, and so suddenly ceased to be the special instrument in the hands of the Spirit, kept plod, plod, plodding on, with no bitterness of heart. For twenty years he had no share in the development of Gentile Christianity, of which he had sowed the first seed, but had to do much less conspicuous work. He toiled away there in Cæsarea patient, persevering, and contented, because he loved the work, and he loved the work because he loved Him that had set it. He seemed to be passed over by his Lord in His choice of instruments. It was he who was selected to be the first man that should preach to the heathen. But did you ever notice that although he was probably in Cæsarea at the time, Cornelius was not bid to apply to *Philip*, who was at his elbow,

but to send to Joppa for the Apostle Peter? Philip might have sulked and said: 'Why was I not chosen to do this work? I will speak no more in this Name.'

It did not fall to his lot to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. One who came after him was preferred before him, and the Hellenist Saul was set to the task which might have seemed naturally to belong to the Hellenist Philip. He too might have said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' No doubt he did say it in spirit, with noble self-abnegation and freedom from jealousy. He cordially welcomed Paul to his house in Cæsarea twenty years afterwards, and rejoiced that one sows and another reaps; and that so the division of labour is the multiplication of gladness.

A beautiful superiority to all the low thoughts that are apt to mar our persistency in unobtrusive and unrecognised work is set before us in this story. There are many temptations to-day, dear brethren, what with gossiping newspapers and other means of publicity for everything that is done, for men to say, 'Well, if I cannot get any notice for my work I shall not do it.'

Boys in the street will refuse to join in games, saying, 'I shall not play unless I am captain or have the big drum.' And there are not wanting Christian men who lay down like conditions. 'Play well thy part' wherever it is. Never mind the honour. Do the duty God appoints, and He that has the two mites of the widow in His treasury will never forget any of our works, and at the right time will tell them out before His Father, and before the holy angels.

GRACE TRIUMPHANT

'And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. 3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? 5. And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 6. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. 8. And Saul arose from the earth: and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. 9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. 10. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. 11. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth, 12. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. . . . 17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. 20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.'—Acts, ix. 1-12; 17-20.

THIS chapter begins with 'but,' which contrasts Saul's persistent hatred, which led him to Gentile lands to persecute, with Philip's expansive evangelistic work. Both men were in profound earnest, both went abroad to carry on their work, but the one sought to plant what the other was eager to destroy. If the 'but' in verse 1 contrasts, the 'yet' connects the verse with chapter viii. 3. Saul's fury was no passing outburst, but enduring. Like other indulged passions, it grew with exercise, and had come to be as his very life-breath, and now planned, not only imprisonment, but death, for the heretics.

Not content with carrying his hateful inquisition into the homes of the Christians in Jerusalem, he will follow

the fugitives to Damascus. The extension of the persecution was his own thought. He was not the tool of the Sanhedrin, but their mover. They would probably have been content to cleanse Jerusalem, but the young zealot would not rest till he had followed the dispersed poison into every corner where it might have trickled. The high priest would not discourage such useful zeal, however he might smile at its excess.

So Saul got the letters he asked, and some attendants, apparently, to help him in his hunt, and set off for Damascus. Painters have imagined him as riding thither, but more probably he and his people went on foot. It was a journey of some five or six days. The noon of the last day had come, and the groves of Damascus were, perhaps, in sight. No doubt, the young Pharisee's head was busy settling what he was to begin with when he entered the city, and was exulting in the thought of how he would harry the meek Christians, when the sudden light shone.

At all events, the narrative does not warrant the view, often taken now, that there had been any preparatory process in Saul's mind, which had begun to sap his confidence that Jesus was a blasphemer, and himself a warrior for God. That view is largely adopted in order to get rid of the supernatural, and to bolster up the assumption that there are no sudden conversions; but the narrative of Luke, and Paul's own references, are dead against it. At one moment he is 'yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,' and in almost the next he is prone on his face, asking, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' It was not a case of a landslide suddenly sweeping down, but long prepared for by the gradual percolation of water to the slippery understrata, but

the solid earth was shaken, and the mountain crashed down in sudden ruin.

The causes of Saul's conversion are plain in the narrative, even though the shortened form is adopted, which is found in the Revised Version. The received text has probably been filled out by additions from Paul's own account in chapter xxvi. First came the blaze of light outshining the midday sun, even in that land where its beams are like swords. That blinding light 'shone round about him,' enveloping him in its glory. Chapter xxvi. (verse 13) tells that his companions also were wrapped in the lustre, and that all fell to the earth, no doubt in terror.

Saul is not said, either in this or in his own accounts, to have seen Jesus, but 1 Corinthians xv. 8 establishes that he did so, and Ananias (v. 17) refers to Jesus as having 'appeared.' That appearance, whatever may have been the psychological account of it, was by Paul regarded as being equal in evidential value to the flesh-and-blood vision of the risen Lord which the other Apostles witnessed to, and as placing him in the same line as a witness.

It is to be noted also, that, while the attendants saw the light, they were not blinded, as Saul was; from which it may be inferred that he saw with his bodily eyes the glorified manhood of Jesus, as we are told that one day, when He returns as Judge, 'every eye shall see Him.' Be that as it may,—and we have not material for constructing a theory of the manner of Christ's appearance to Saul,—the overwhelming conviction was flooded into his soul, that the Jesus whom he had thought of as a blasphemer, falsely alleged to have risen from the dead, lived in heavenly glory, amid celestial brightness too dazzling for human eyes.

The words of gentle remonstrance issuing from the flashing glory went still further to shake the foundations of the young Pharisee's life; for they, as with one lightning gleam, laid bare the whole madness and sin of the crusade which he had thought acceptable to God. 'Why persecutest thou Me?' Then the odious heretics were knit by some mysterious bond to this glorious One, so that He bled in their wounds and felt their pains! Then Saul had been, as his old teacher dreaded they of the Sanhedrin might be, fighting against God! How the reasons for Saul's persecution had crumbled away, till there were none left with which to answer Jesus' question! Jesus lived, and was exalted to glory. He was identified with His servants. He had appeared to Saul, and deigned to plead with him.

No wonder that the man who had been planning fresh assaults on the disciples ten minutes before, was crushed and abject as he lay there on the road, and these tremendous new convictions rushed like a cataract over and into his soul! No wonder that the lessons burned in on him in that hour of destiny became the centre-point of all his future teaching! That vision revolutionised his thinking and his life. None can affirm that it was incompetent to do so.

Luke's account here, like Paul's in chapter xxii., represents further instructions from Jesus as postponed till Saul's meeting with Ananias, while Paul's other account in chapter xxvi. omits mention of the latter, and gives the substance of what he said in Damascus as said on the road by Jesus. The one account is more detailed than the other, that is all. The gradual unfolding of the heavenly purpose which our narrative gives is in accord with the divine manner. For the moment enough had been done to

convert the persecutor into the servant, to level with the ground his self-righteousness, to reveal to him the glorified Jesus, to bend his will and make it submissive. The rest would be told him in due time.

The attendants had fallen to the ground like him, but seem to have struggled to their feet again, while he lay prostrate. They saw the brightness, but not the Person: they heard the voice, but not the words. Saul staggered by their help to his feet, and then found that with open eyes he was blind. Imagination or hallucination does not play tricks of that sort with the organs of sense.

The supernatural is too closely intertwined with the story to be taken out of it without reducing it to tatters. The greatest of Christian teachers, who has probably exercised more influence than any man who ever lived, was made a Christian by a miracle. That fact is not to be got rid of. But we must remember that once when He speaks of it He points to God's revelation of His Son '*in Him*' as its essential character. The external appearance was the vehicle of the inward revelation. It is to be remembered, too, that the miracle did not take away Saul's power of accepting or rejecting the Christ; for he tells Agrippa that he was 'not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'

What a different entry he made into Damascus from what he expected, and what a different man it was that crawled up to the door of Judas, in the street that is called Straight, from the self-confident young fanatic who had left Jerusalem with the high priest's letters in his bosom and fierce hate in his heart!

Ananias was probably not one of the fugitives, as his language about Saul implies that he knew of his doings only by hearsay. The report of Saul's coming and authority to arrest disciples had reached Damascus

before him, with the wonderful quickness with which news travels in the East, nobody knows how. Ananias's fears being quieted, he went to the house where for three days Saul had been lying lonely in the dark, fasting, and revolving many things in his heart. No doubt his Lord had spoken many a word to him, though not by vision, but by whispering to his spirit. Silence and solitude root truth in a soul. After such a shock, absolute seclusion was best.

Ananias discharged his commission with lovely tenderness and power. How sweet and strange to speaker and hearer would that 'Brother Saul' sound! How strong and grateful a confirmation of his vision would Ananias's reference to the appearance of the Lord bring! How humbly would the proud Pharisee bow to receive, laid on his head, the hands that he had thought to bind with chains! What new eyes would look out on a world in which all things had become new, when there fell from them as it had been scales, and as quickly as had come the blinding, so quickly came the restored vision!

Ananias was neither Apostle nor official, yet the laying on of his hands communicated 'the Holy Ghost.' Saul received that gift before baptism, not after or through the ordinance. It was important for his future relations to the Apostles that he should not have been introduced to the Church by them, or owed to them his first human Christian teaching. Therefore he could say that he was 'an Apostle, not from men, neither through man.' It was important for us that in that great instance that divine gift should have been bestowed without the conditions accompanying, which have too often been regarded as necessary for, its possession.

‘THIS WAY’

‘Any of this way.’—ACTS ix. 2.

THE name of ‘Christian’ was not applied to themselves by the followers of Jesus before the completion of the New Testament. There were other names in currency before that designation—which owed its origin to the scoffing wits of Antioch—was accepted by the Church. They called themselves ‘disciples,’ ‘believers,’ ‘saints,’ ‘brethren,’ as if feeling about for a title.

Here is a name that had obtained currency for a while, and was afterwards disused. We find it five times in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, never elsewhere; and always, with one exception, it should be rendered, as it is in the Revised Version, not ‘*this* way,’ as if being one amongst many, but ‘*the* way,’ as being the only one.

Now, I have thought that this designation of Christians as ‘those of the way’ rests upon a very profound and important view of what Christianity is, and may teach us some lessons if we will ponder it; and I ask your attention to two or three of these for a few moments now.

I. First, then, I take this name as being a witness to the conviction that in Christianity we have the only road to God.

There may be some reference in the name to the remarkable words of our Lord Jesus Christ: ‘I am the Way. No man cometh to the Father but by Me,’—words of which the audacity is unparalleled and unpardonable, except upon the supposition that He bears an unique relation to God on the one hand, and to all

mankind upon the other. In them He claims to be the sole medium of communication between heaven and earth, God and man. And that same exclusiveness is reflected in this name for Christians. It asserts that faith in Jesus Christ, the acceptance of His teaching, mediation and guidance, is the only path that climbs to God, and by it alone do we come to knowledge of, and communion with, our divine Father.

I do not dwell upon the fact that, according to our Lord's own teaching, and according to the whole New Testament, Christ's work of making God known to man did not begin with His Incarnation and earthly life, but that from the beginning that eternal Word was the agent of all divine activity in creation, and in the illumination of mankind. So that, not only all the acts of the self-revealing God were through Him, but that from Him, as from the light of men, came all the light in human hearts, of reason and of conscience, by which there were and are in all men, some dim knowledge of God, and some feeling after, or at the lowest some consciousness of, Him. But the historical facts of Christ's incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the source of all solid certitude, and of all clear knowledge of our Father in Heaven. His words are spirit and life; His works are unspoken words; and by both He declares unto His brethren the Name, and is the self-manifestation of, the Father.

Think of the contrast presented by the world's conceptions of Godhead, and the reality as unveiled in Christ! On the one hand you have gods lustful, selfish, passionate, capricious, cruel, angry, vile; or gods remote, indifferent, not only passionless, but heartless, inexorable, unapproachable, whom no man can know, whom no man can love, whom no man can trust. On

the other hand, if you look at Christ's tears as the revelation of God; if you look at Christ's ruth and pity as the manifestation of the inmost glory of the divine nature; if you take your stand at the foot of the Cross—a strange place to see 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'!—and look up there at Him dying for the world, and are able to say, 'Lo! this is our God! through all the weary centuries we have waited for Him, and this is He!' then you can understand how true it is that there, and there only, is the good news proclaimed that lifts the burden from every heart, and reveals God the Lover and the Friend of every soul.

And if, further, we consider the difference between the dim 'peradventures,' the doubts and fears, the uncertain conclusions drawn from questionable, and often partial, premises, which confessedly never amount to demonstration, if we consider the contrast between these and the daylight of fact which we meet in Jesus Christ, His love, life, and death, then we can feel how superior in certitude, as in substance, the revelation of God in Jesus is to all these hopes, longings, doubts, and how it alone is worthy to be called the knowledge of God, or is solid enough to abide comparison with the certainties of the most arrogant physical science.

There never was a time in the history of the world when, so clearly and unmistakably, every thinking soul amongst cultivated nations was being brought up to this alternative—Christ, the Revealer of God, or no knowledge of God at all. The old dreams of heathenism are impossible for us; modern agnosticism will make very quick work of a deism which does not cling to the Christ as the Revealer of the Godhead. And I, for my part, believe that there is one thing, and one thing only,

which will save modern Europe from absolute godlessness, and that is the coming back to the old truth, 'No man hath seen God' by sense, or intuition, or reason, or conscience, 'at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'

But it is not merely as bringing to us the only certain knowledge of our Father God that Christianity is 'the way,' but it is also because by it alone we come into fellowship with the God whom it reveals to us. If there rises up before your mind the thought of Him in the Heavens, there will rise up also in your consciousness the sense of your own sin. And that is no delusion nor fancy; it is the most patent fact, that between you and your Father in Heaven, howsoever loving, tender, compassionate, and forgiving, there lies a great gulf. You cannot go to God, my brother, with all that guilt heaped upon your conscience; you cannot come near to Him with all that mass of evil which you know is there, working in your soul. How shall a sinful soul come to a holy God? And there is only one answer—that great Lord, by His blessed death upon the Cross, has cleared away all the mountains of guilt and sin that rise up frowning between each single soul and the Father in Heaven; and through Him, by a new and living way, which He hath opened for us, we have entrance to God, and dwell with Him.

And it is not only that He brings to us the knowledge of God, and that He clears away all obstacles, and makes fellowship between God and us possible for the most polluted and sinful of spirits, but it is also that, by the knowledge of His great love to us, love is kindled in our hearts, and we are drawn into that path which, as a matter of fact, we shall not tread unless we

yield to the magnetic attraction of the love of God as revealed 'in the face of Jesus Christ.'

Men do not seek fellowship with God until they are drawn to Him by the love that is revealed upon the Cross. Men do not yield their hearts to Him until their hearts are melted down by the fire of that Infinite divine love which disdained not to be humiliated and refused not to die for their sakes. Practically and really we come to God, when—and I venture upon the narrowness of saying, *only* when—God has come to us in His dear Son. '*The way*' to God is through Christ. Have you trod it, my friend—that new and living way, which leads within the veil, into the secrets of loving communion with your Father in Heaven?

II. Then there is another principle, of which this designation of our text is also the witness, viz., that in Christianity we have the path of conduct and practical life traced out for us all.

The 'way of a man' is, of course, a metaphor for his outward life and conduct. It is connected with the familiar old image which belongs to the poetry of all languages, by which life is looked at as a journey. That metaphor speaks to us of the continual changefulness of our mortal condition; it speaks to us, also, of the effort and the weariness which often attend it. It proclaims also the solemn thought that a man's life is a unity, and that, progressive, it goes some whither, and arrives at a definite goal.

And that idea is taken up in this phrase, '*the way*,' in such a fashion as that there are two things asserted: first, that Christianity provides *a way*, a path for the practical activity, that it moulds our life into a unity, that it prescribes the line of direction which it is to follow, that it has a starting-point, and stages, and an

end; also, that Christianity is *the* way for practical life, the only path and mode of conduct which corresponds with all the obligations and nature of a man, and which reason, conscience, and experience will approve. Let us look, just for a moment or two, at these two thoughts: Christianity is *a* way; Christianity is *the* way.

It is *a* way. These early disciples must have grasped with great clearness and tenacity the practical side of the Gospel, or they would never have adopted this name. If they had thought of it as being only a creed, they would not have done so.

And it is not only a creed. All creed is meant to influence conduct. If I may so say, *credenda*, 'things to be believed,' are meant to underlie the *agenda*, the things to be done. Every doctrine of the New Testament, like the great blocks of concrete that are dropped into a river in order to lay the foundation of a bridge, or the embankment that is run across a valley in order to carry a railway upon it,—every doctrine of the New Testament is meant to influence the conduct, the 'walk and conversation,' and to provide a path on which activity may advance and expatiate.

I cannot, of course, dwell upon this point with sufficient elaboration, or take up one after another the teachings of the New Testament, in order to show how close is their bearing upon practical life. There is plenty of abstract theology in the form of theological systems, skeletons all dried up that have no life in them. There is nothing of that sort in the principles as they lie on the pages of the New Testament. There they are all throbbing with life, and all meant to influence life and conduct.

Remember, my friend, that unless your Christianity is doing that for you, unless it has prescribed a path of

life for you, and moulded your steps into a great unity, and drawn you along the road, it is nought,—nought!

But the whole matter may be put into half a dozen sentences. The living heart of Christianity, either considered as a revelation to a man, or as a power within a man, that is to say, either objective or subjective, is love. It is the revelation of the love of God that is the inmost essence of it as revelation. It is love in my heart that is the inmost essence of it as a fact of my nature. And is not love the most powerful of all forces to influence conduct? Is it not 'the fulfilling of the law,' because its one single self includes all commandments, and is the ideal of all duty, and also because it is the power which will secure the keeping of all the law which itself lays down?

But love may be followed out into its two main effects. These are self-surrender and imitation. And I say that a religious system which is, in its inmost heart and essence, love, is thereby shown to be the most practical of all systems, because thereby it is shown to be a great system of self-surrender and imitation.

The deepest word of the Gospel is, 'Yield yourselves to God.' Bring your wills and bow them before Him, and say, 'Here am I; take me, and use me as a pawn on Thy great chessboard, to be put where Thou wilt.' When once a man's will is absorbed into the divine will, as a drop of water is into the ocean, he is free, and has happiness and peace, and is master and lord of himself and of the universe. That system which proclaims love as its heart sets in action self-surrender as the most practical of all the powers of life.

Love is imitation. And Jesus Christ's life is set before us as the pattern for all our conduct. We are

to follow in His footsteps. These mark our path. We are to follow Him, as a traveller who knows not his way will carefully tread in the steps of his guide. We are to imitate Him, as a scholar who is learning to draw will copy every touch of the master's pencil.

Strange that that short life, fragmentarily reported in four little tracts, full of unapproachable peculiarities, and having no part in many of the relationships which make so large a portion of most lives, is yet so transparently under the influence of the purest and broadest principles of righteousness and morality as that every age and each sex, and men of all professions, idiosyncrasies, temperaments, and positions, all stages of civilisation and culture, of every period, and of every country, may find in it the all-sufficient pattern for them!

Thus in Christianity we have a way. It prescribes a line of direction for the life, and brings all its power to bear in marking the course which we should pursue and in making us willing and able to pursue it.

How different, how superior to all other systems which aspire to regulate the outward life that system is! It is superior, in its applicability to all conditions. It is a very difficult thing for any man to apply the generalities of moral law and righteousness to the individual cases in his life. The stars are very bright, but they do not show me which street to turn up when I am at a loss; but Christ's example comes very near to us, and guides us, not indeed in regard to questions of prudence or expediency, but in regard to all questions of right or wrong. It is superior, in the help it gives to a soul struggling with temptation. It is very hard to keep law or duty clearly before our eyes at such a moment, when it is most needful to do so. The light-

house is lost in the fog, but the example of Jesus Christ dissipates many mists of temptation to the heart that loves Him; and 'they that follow Him shall not walk in darkness.'

It is superior in this, further, that patterns fail because they are only patterns, and cannot get themselves executed, and laws fail because they are only laws and cannot get themselves obeyed. What is the use of a signpost to a man who is lame, or who does not want to go down the road, though he knows it well enough? But Christianity brings both the commandment and the motive that keeps the commandment.

And so it is *the* path along which we can travel. It is the only road that corresponds to all our necessities, and capacities, and obligations.

It is the only path, my brother, that will be approved by reason, conscience, and experience. The greatest of our English mystics says somewhere—I do not profess to quote with verbal accuracy—'There are two questions which put an end to all the vain projects and designs of human life. The one is, "What for?" the other, "What good will the aim do you if attained?"'

If we look at 'all the ways of men' calmly, and with due regard to the wants of their souls, reason cannot but say that they are 'vain and melancholy.' If we consult our own experience we cannot but confess that whatsoever we have had or enjoyed, apart from God, has either proved disappointing in the very moment of its possession, or has been followed by a bitter taste on the tongue; or in a little while has faded, and left us standing with the stalk in our hands from which the bloom has dropped. Generation after generation has sighed its 'Amen!' to the stern old word: 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!' And here to-day, in the midst

of the boasted progress of this generation, we find cultured men amongst us, lapped in material comfort, and with all the light of this century blazing upon them, preaching again the old Buddhist doctrine that annihilation is the only heaven, and proclaiming that life is not worth living, and that 'it were better not to be.'

Dear brother, one path, and one path only, leads to what all men desire—peace and happiness. One path, and one path only, leads to what all men know they ought to seek—purity and godliness. We are like men in the backwoods, our paths go circling round and round, we have lost our way. 'The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, for he knoweth not how to come to the city.' Jesus Christ has cut a path through the forest. Tread you in it, and you will find that it is 'the way of pleasantness' and 'the path of peace.'

III. And now, one last word. This remarkable designation seems to me to be a witness also to another truth, viz. that in Christianity we have the only way home.

The only way home! All other modes and courses of life and conduct stop at the edge of a great gulf, like some path that goes down an incline to the edge of a precipice, and the heedless traveller that has been going on, not knowing whither it led, tilts over when he comes there. Every other way that men can follow is broken short off by death. And if there were no other reason to allege, that is enough to condemn them. What is a man to do in another world if all his life long he has only cultivated tastes which want this world for their gratification? What is the sensualist to do when he gets there? What is the shrewd man of business in Manchester to do when he comes into a

world where there are no bargains, and he cannot go on 'Change on Tuesdays and Fridays? What will he do with himself? What does he do with himself now, when he goes away from home for a month, and does not get his ordinary work and surroundings? What will he do then? What will a young lady do in another world, who spends her days here in reading trashy novels and magazines? What will any of us do who have set our affections and our tastes upon this poor, perishing, miserable world? Would you think it was common sense in a young man who was going to be a doctor, and took no interest in anything but farming? Is it not as stupid a thing for men and women to train themselves for a condition which is transient, and not to train themselves for the condition into which they are certainly going?

And, on the other hand, the path that Christ makes runs clear on, without a break, across the gulf, like some daring railway bridge thrown across a mountain gorge, and goes straight on on the other side without a curve, only with an upward gradient. The manner of work may change; the spirit of the work and the principles of it will remain. Self-surrender will be the law of Heaven, and 'they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' Better to begin here as we mean to end yonder! Better to begin here what we can carry with us, in essence though not in form, into the other life; and so, through all the changes of life, and through the great change of death, to keep one unbroken straight course! 'They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.'

We live in an else trackless waste, but across the desert Jesus Christ has thrown a way; too high for

ravenous beasts to spring on or raging foes to storm; too firm for tempest to overthrow or make impassable; too plain for simple hearts to mistake. We may all journey on it, if we will, and 'come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads.'

Christ is the Way. O brother! trust thy sinful soul to His blood and mediation, and thy sins will be forgiven. And then, loving Him, follow Him. 'This is the way; walk ye in it.'

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE EARLY CHURCH

'So the Church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied.'—ACTS ix. 31 (R.V.).

A MAN climbing a hill stops every now and then to take breath and look about him; and in the earlier part of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles there are a number of such landing-places where the writer suspends the course of his narrative, in order to give a general notion of the condition of the Church at the moment. We have in this verse one of the shortest, but perhaps the most significant, of these resting-places. The original and proper reading, instead of 'the Churches,' as our Version has it, reads 'the Church' as a whole—the whole body of believers in the three districts named—Judæa, Galilee, and Samaria—being in the same circumstances and passing through like experiences. The several small communities of disciples formed a whole. They were 'churches' individually; they were collectively 'the Church.' Christ's order of expansion, given in chapter i., had been thus far followed, and the sequence here sums up the progress

which the Acts has thus far recorded. Galilee had been the cradle of the Church, but the onward march of the Gospel had begun at Jerusalem. Before Luke goes on to tell how the last part of our Lord's programme—'to the uttermost parts of the earth'—began to be carried into execution by the conversion of Cornelius, he gives us this bird's-eye view. To its significant items I desire to draw your attention now.

There are three of them: outward rest, inward progress, outward increase.

I. Outward rest.

'Then had the Church rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria.'

The principal persecutor had just been converted, and that would somewhat damp the zeal of his followers. Saul having gone over to the enemy, it would be difficult to go on harrying the Church with the same spirit, when the chief actor was turned traitor. And besides that, historians tell us that there were political complications which gave both Romans and Jews quite enough to do to watch one another, instead of persecuting this little community of Christians. I have nothing to do with these, but this one point I desire to make, that the condition of security and tranquillity in which the Church found itself conduced to spiritual good and growth. This has not always been the case. As one of our quaint divines says, 'as in cities where ground is scarce men build high up, so in times of straitness and persecution the Christian community, and the individuals who compose it, are often raised to a higher level of devotion than in easier and quieter times.' But these primitive Christians utilised this breathing-space in order to grow, and having a moment of lull and stillness in the storm, turned it to the

highest and best uses. Is that what you and I do with our quiet times? None of us have any occasion to fear persecution or annoyance of that sort, but there are other thorns in our pillows besides these, and other rough places in our beds, and we are often disturbed in our nests. When there does come a quiet time in which no outward circumstances fret us, do we seize it as coming from God, in order that, with undistracted energies, we may cast ourselves altogether into the work of growing like our Master and doing His will more fully? How many of us, dear brethren, have misused both our adversity and our prosperity by making the one an occasion for deeper worldliness, and the other a reason for forgetting Him in the darkness as in the light? To be absorbed by earthly things, whether by the enjoyment of their possession or by the bitter pain and misery of their withdrawal, is fatal to all our spiritual progress, and only they use things prosperous and things adverse aright, who take them both as means by which they may be wafted nearer to their God. Whatsoever forces act upon us, if we put the helm right and trim the sails as we ought, they will carry us to our haven. And whatsoever forces act upon us, if we neglect the sailor's skill and duty, we shall be washed backwards and forwards in the trough of the sea, and make no progress in the voyage. 'Then had the Church rest'—and grew lazy? 'Then had the Church rest'—and grew worldly? Then was I happy and prosperous and peaceful in my home and in my business, and I said, 'I shall never be moved,' and I forgot my God? 'Then had the Church rest, and was edified.'

Now, in the next place, note the

II. Inward progress.

There are difficulties about the exact relation of the clauses here to one another, the discussion of which would be fitter for a lecture-room than for a pulpit. I do not mean to trouble you with these, but it seems to me that we may perhaps best understand the writer's intention if we throw together the clauses which stand in the middle of this verse, and take them as being a description of the inward progress, being 'edified' and 'walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.' There are two things, then—the being 'edified' and 'walking'; and I wish to say a word or two about each of them.

Now that word 'edified' and the cognate one 'edification' have been enfeebled in signification so as to mean very much less than they did to Luke. When we speak of 'being edified,' what do we mean? Little more than that we have been instructed, and especially that we have been comforted. And what is the instrument of edification in our ordinary religious parlance? Good words, wise teaching, or pious speech. But the New Testament means vastly more than this by the word, and looks not so much to other people's utterances as to a man's own strenuous efforts, as the means of edification. Much misunderstanding would have been avoided if our translators had really translated, instead of putting us off with a Latinised word which to many readers conveys little meaning and none of the significant metaphor of the original. 'Being edified' sounds very theological and far away from daily life. Would it not sound more real if we read 'being built up'? That is the emblem of the process that ought to go on, not only in the Christian community as a whole, but in every individual member of it. Each Christian is bound to build himself up and to help to build up other

Christians; and God builds them all up by His Spirit. We have brought before us the picture of the rising of some stately fabric upon a firm foundation, course by course, stone by stone, each laid by a separate act of the builder's hand, and carefully bedded in its place until the whole is complete.

That is one emblem of the growth of the Christian community and of the Christian individual, and the other clause that is coupled with it in the text seems to me to give the same idea under a slightly different figure. The rising of a stately building and the advance on a given path suggest substantially the same notion of progress.

And of these two metaphors, I would dwell chiefly on the former, because it is the less familiar of the two to modern readers, and because it is of some consequence to restore it to its weight and true significance in the popular mind. Edification, then, is the building up of Christian character, and it involves four things: a foundation, a continuous progress, a patient, persistent effort, and a completion.

Now, Christian men and women, this is our office for ourselves, and, according to our faculty and opportunities, for the Churches with which we may stand connected, that on the foundation which is Jesus Christ—'and other foundation can no man lay'—we all should slowly, carefully, unceasingly be at our building work; each day's attainment, like the course of stones laid in some great temple, becoming the basis upon which to-morrow's work is to be piled, and each having in it the toil of the builder and being a result and monument of his strenuous effort, and each being built in, according to the plan that the great Architect has given, and each tending a little nearer to

the roof-tree, and the time that 'the top stone shall be brought forth with the shout of rejoicing.' Is that a transcript of my life and yours? Do we make a business of the cultivation of Christian character thus? Do we rest the whole structure of our lives upon Jesus Christ? And then, do we, hour by hour, moment by moment, lay the fair stones, until

'Firm and fair the building rise,
A temple to His praise.'

The old worn metaphor, which we have vulgarised and degraded into a synonym for a comfortable condition produced by a brother's words, carries in it the solemnest teaching as to what the duty and privilege of all Christian souls is—to 'build themselves up for an habitation of God through the Spirit.'

But note further the elements of which this progress consists. May we not suppose that both metaphors refer to the clauses that follow, and that 'the fear of the Lord' and 'the comfort of the Holy Ghost' are the particulars in which the Christian is built up and walks?

'The fear of the Lord' is eminently an Old Testament expression, and occurs only once or twice in the New. But its meaning is thoroughly in accordance with the loftiest teaching of the new revelation. 'The fear of the Lord' is that reverential awe of Him, by which we are ever conscious of His presence with us, and ever seek, as our supreme aim and end, to submit our wills to His commandment, and to do the things that are pleasing in His sight. Are you and I building ourselves up in that? Do we feel more thrillingly and gladly to-day than we did yesterday, that God is beside us? And do we submit ourselves more loyally, more easily, more joyously to His will, in blessed

obedience, now than ever before? Have we learned, and are we learning, moment by moment, more of that 'secret of the Lord' which 'is with them that fear Him,' and of that 'covenant' which 'He will show' to them? Unless we do, our growth in Christian character is a very doubtful thing. And are we advancing, too, in that other element which so beautifully completes and softens the notion of the fear of the Lord, 'the encouragement' which the divine Spirit gives us? Are we bolder to-day than we were yesterday? Are we ready to meet with more undaunted confidence whatever we may have to face? Do we feel ever increasing within us the full blessedness and inspiration of that divine visitant? And do these sweet communications take all the 'torment' away from 'fear,' and leave only the bliss of reverential love? They who walk in the fear of the Lord, and who with the fear have the courage that the divine Spirit gives, will 'have rest,' like the first Christians, whatsoever storms may howl around them, and whatsoever enemies may threaten to disturb their peace.

And so, lastly, note

III. The outward growth.

Thus building themselves up, and thus growing, the Church 'was multiplied.' Of course it was. Christian men and women that are spiritually alive, and who, because they are alive, grow, and grow in these things, the manifest reverence of God, and the manifest 'comfort' of the divine Spirit's giving, will commend their gospel to a blind world. They will be an attractive force in the midst of men, and their inward growth will make them eager to hold forth the word of life, and will give them 'a mouth and wisdom' which nothing but genuine spiritual experience can give.

And so, dear friends, especially those of you who set yourselves to any of the many forms of Christian work which prevail in this day, learn the lesson of my text, and make sure of 'a' before you go on to 'b,' and see to it that before you set yourselves to try to multiply the Church, you set yourselves to build up yourselves in your most holy faith.

We hear a great deal nowadays about 'forward movements,' and I sympathise with all that is said in favour of them. But I would remind you that the precursor of every genuine forward movement is a Godward movement, and that it is worse than useless to talk about lengthening the cords unless you begin with strengthening the stakes. The little prop that holds up the bell-tent that will contain half-a-dozen soldiers will be all too weak for the great one that will cover a company. And the fault of some Christian people is that they set themselves to work upon others without remembering that the first requisite is a deepened and growing godliness and devotion in their own souls. Dear friends, begin at home, and remember that whilst what the world calls eloquence *may* draw people, and oddities *will* draw them, and all sorts of lower attractions will gather multitudes for a little while, the one solid power which Christian men and women can exercise for the numerical increase of the Church is rooted in, and only tenable through, their own personal increase day by day in consecration and likeness to the Saviour, in possession of the Spirit, and in loving fear of the Lord.

COPIES OF CHRIST'S MANNER

'And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and makethy bed. . . . 40. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed; and, turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise.'—ACTS ix. 34, 40.

I HAVE put these two miracles together, not only because they were closely connected in time and place, but because they have a very remarkable and instructive feature in common. They are both evidently moulded upon Christ's miracles; are distinct imitations of what Peter had seen Him do. And their likenesses to and differences from our Lord's manner of working are equally noteworthy. It is to the lessons from these two aspects, common to both miracles, that I desire to turn now.

I. First, notice the similarities and the lesson which they teach.

The two cases before us are alike, in that both of them find parallels in our Lord's miracles. The one is the cure of a paralytic, which pairs off with the well-known story in the Gospels concerning the man that was borne by four, and let down through the roof into Christ's presence. The other of them, the raising of Dorcas, or Tabitha, of course corresponds with the three resurrections of dead people which are recorded in the Gospels.

And now, note the likenesses. Jesus Christ said to the paralysed man, 'Arise, take up thy bed.' Peter says to Æneas, 'Arise, and make thy bed.' The one command was appropriate to the circumstances of a man who was not in his own house, and whose control over his long-disused muscles in obeying Christ's word was a confirmation to himself of the reality and

completeness of his cure. The other was appropriate to a man bedridden in his own house; and it had precisely the same purpose as the analogous injunction from our Lord, 'Take up thy bed and walk.' Æneas was lying at home, and so Peter, remembering how Jesus Christ had demonstrated to others, and affirmed to the man himself, the reality of the miraculous blessing given to him, copies his Master's method, 'Æneas, make thy bed.' It is an echo and resemblance of the former incident, and is a distinct piece of imitation of it.

And then, if we turn to the other narrative, the intentional moulding of the manner of the miracle, consecrated in the eyes of the loving disciple, because it was Christ's manner, is still more obvious. When Jesus Christ went into the house of Jairus there was the usual hubbub, the noise of the loud Eastern mourning, and He put them all forth, taking with Him only the father and mother of the damsel, and Peter with James and John. When Peter goes into the upper room, where Tabitha is lying, there are the usual noise of lamentation and the clack of many tongues, extolling the virtues of the dead woman. He remembers how Christ had gone about His miracle, and he, in his turn, 'put them all forth.' Mark, who was Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, gives us the very Aramaic words which our Lord employed when He raised the little girl, *Talitha*, the Aramaic word for 'a damsel,' or young girl; *cumi*, which means in that language 'arise.' Is it not singular and beautiful that Peter's word by the bedside of the dead Dorcas is, with the exception of one letter, absolutely identical? Christ says, *Talitha cumi*. Peter remembered the formula by which the blessing was conveyed, and he copied it. 'Tabitha

cumi!' Is it not clear that he is posing after his Master's attitude; that he is, consciously or unconsciously, doing what he remembered so well had been done in that other upper room, and that the miracles are both of them shaped after the pattern of the miraculous working of Jesus Christ?

Well, now, although we are no miracle-workers, the very same principle which underlay these two works of supernatural power is to be applied to all our work, and to our lives as Christian people. I do not know whether Peter *meant* to do like Jesus Christ or not; I think rather that he was unconsciously and instinctively dropping into the fashion that to him was so sacred. Love always delights in imitation; and the disciples of a great teacher will unconsciously catch the trick of his intonation, even the awkwardness of his attitudes or the peculiarities of his way of looking at things—only, unfortunately, outsides are a good deal more easily imitated than insides. And many a disciple copies such external trifles, and talks in the tones that have, first of all, brought blessed truths to him, whose resemblance to his teacher goes very little further. The principle that underlies these miracles is just this—get near Jesus Christ, and you will catch His manner. Dwell in fellowship with Him, and whether you are thinking about it or not, there will come some faint resemblance to that Lord into your characters and your way of doing things, so that men will 'take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus.' The poor bit of cloth which has held some precious piece of solid perfume will retain fragrance for many a day afterwards, and will bless the scentless air by giving it forth. The man who keeps close to Christ, and has folded Him in his heart, will, like the poor

cloth, give forth a sweetness not his own that will gladden and refresh many nostrils. Live in the light, and you will become light. Keep near Christ, and you will be Christlike. Love Him, and love will do to you what it does to many a wedded pair, and to many kindred hearts: it will transfuse into you something of the characteristics of the object of your love. It is impossible to trust Christ, to obey Christ, to hold communion with Him, and to live beside Him, without becoming like Him. And if such be our inward experience, so will be our outward appearance.

But there may be a specific point given to this lesson in regard to Christian people's ways of doing their work in the world and helping and blessing other folk. Although, as I say, we have no miraculous power at our disposal, we do not need it in order to manifest Jesus Christ and His way of working in our work. And if we dwell beside Him, then, depend upon it, all the characteristics—far more precious than the accidents of manner, or tone, or attitude in working a miracle—all the characteristics so deeply and blessedly stamped upon His life of self-sacrifice and man-helping devotion will be reproduced in us. Jesus Christ, when He went through the wards of the hospital of the world, was overflowing with quick sympathy for every sorrow that met His eye. If you and I are living near Him, we shall never steel our hearts nor lock up our sensibilities against any suffering that it is within our power to stanch or to alleviate. Jesus Christ never grudged trouble, never thought of Himself, never was impatient of interruption, never repelled importunity, never sent away empty any outstretched hand. And if we live near Him, self-oblivious willingness to spend and be spent will mark our lives, and we shall not consider

that we have the right of possession or of sole enjoyment of any of the blessings that are given to us. Jesus Christ, according to the beautiful and significant words of one of the Gospels, 'healed them that had need of healing.' Why that singular designation for the people that were standing around Him but to teach us that wide as men's necessity was His sympathy, and that broad as the sympathy of Christ were the help and healing which He brought? And so, with like width of compassion, with like perfectness of self-oblivion, with equal remoteness from consciousness of superiority or display of condescension, Christian men should go amongst the sorrowful and the sad and the outcast and do their miracles—'greater works' than those which Christ did, as He Himself has told us—after the manner in which He did His. If they did, the world would be a different place, and the Church would be a different Church, and you would not have people writing in the newspapers to demonstrate that Christianity was 'played out.'

II. Further, note the differences and the lessons from them.

Take the first of the two miracles. 'Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed.' That first clause points to the great difference. Take the second miracle, 'Jesus Christ put them all forth, and stretched out His hand, and said, Damsel, arise!' 'Peter put them all forth, . . . and said, Tabitha, arise!' but between the putting forth and the miracle he did something which Christ did not do, and he did not do something which Christ did do. 'He kneeled down and prayed.' Jesus Christ did not do that. 'And Jesus put forth His hand, and said, Arise!' Peter did not do that. But he put forth his hand *after* the

miracle was wrought ; not to communicate life, but to help the living woman to get to her feet ; and so, both by what he did in his prayer and by what he did not do after Christ's pattern, the extension of the hand that was the channel of the vitality, he drew a broad distinction between the servant's copy and the Master's original.

The lessons from the differences are such as the following.

Christ works miracles by His inherent power ; His servants do their works only as His instruments and organs. I need not dwell upon the former thought ; but it is the latter at which I wish to look for a moment. The lesson, then, of the difference is that Christian men, in all their work for the Master and for the world, are ever to keep clear before themselves, and to make very obvious to other people, that they are nothing more than channels and instruments. The less the preacher, the teacher, the Christian benefactor of any sort puts himself in the foreground, or in evidence at all, the more likely are his words and works to be successful. If you hear a man, for instance, preaching a sermon, and you see that he is thinking about himself, he may talk with the tongues of men and of angels, but he will do no good to anybody. The first condition of work for the Lord is—hide yourself behind your message, behind your Master, and make it very plain that His is the power, and that you are but a tool in the Workman's hand.

And then, further, another lesson is, Be very sure of the power that will work in you. What a piece of audacity it was for Peter to go and stand by the paralytic man's couch and say, ' Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' Yes, audacity ; unless he had been in such

constant and close touch with his Master that he was sure that his Master was working through him. And is it not beautiful to see how absolutely confident he is that Jesus Christ's work was not ended when He went up into heaven; but that there, in that little stuffy room, where the man had lain motionless for eight long years, Jesus Christ was present, and working? O brethren, the Christian Church does not half enough believe in the actual presence and operation of Jesus Christ, here and now, in and through all His servants! We are ready enough to believe that He worked when He was in the world long ago, that He is going to work when He comes back to the world, at some far-off future period. But do we believe that He is verily putting forth His power, in no metaphor, but in simple reality, at present and here, and, if we will, through us?

‘Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.’ Be sure that if you keep near Christ, if you will try to mould yourselves after His likeness, if you expect Him to work through you, and do not hinder His work by self-conceit and self-consciousness of any sort, then it will be no presumption, but simple faith which He delights in and will vindicate, if you, too, go and stand by a paralytic and say, ‘Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,’ or go and stand by people dead in trespasses and sins and say, after you have prayed, ‘Arise.’

We are here for the very purpose for which Peter was in Lydda and Joppa—to carry on and copy the healing and the quickening work of Christ, by His present power, and after His blessed example.

WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSED

'There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band. 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. 9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12. Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'—ACTS x. 1-20.

THE Church was at first in appearance only a Jewish sect; but the great stride is now to be taken which carries it over the border into the Gentile world, and begins its universal aspect. If we consider the magnitude of the change, and the difficulties of training and prejudice which it had to encounter in the Church itself, we shall not wonder at the abundance of supernatural occurrences which attended it. Without some such impulse, it is difficult to conceive of its having been accomplished.

In this narrative we see the supernatural preparation on both sides. God, as it were, lays His right hand

on Cornelius, and His left on Peter, and impels them towards each other. Philip had already preached to the Ethiopian, and probably the anonymous brethren in Acts xi. 20 had already spoken the word to pure Greeks at Antioch; but the importance of Peter's action here is that by reason of his Apostleship, his recognition of Gentile Christians becomes the act of the whole community. His entrance into Cornelius's house ended the Jewish phase of the Church. The epoch was worthy of divine intervention, and the step needed divine warrant. Therefore the abundance of miracle at this point is not superfluous.

I. We have the vision which guided the seeker to the light. Cæsarea, as the seat of government, was the focus of Gentilism, and that the Gospel should effect a lodgment there was significant. Still more so was the person whom it first won,—an officer of the Roman army, the very emblem of worldly power, loathed by every true Jew. A centurion was not an officer of high rank, but Cornelius's name suggests the possibility of his connection with a famous Roman family, and the name of the 'band' or 'cohort,' of which his troop was part, suggests that it was raised in Italy, and therefore properly officered by Romans. His residence in Judæa had touched his spirit with some knowledge of, and reverence for, the Jehovah whom this strange people worshipped. He was one of a class numerous in these times of religious unrest, who had been more or less affected by the pure monotheism of the Jew.

It is remarkable that the centurions of the New Testament are all more or less favourably inclined towards Christ and Christianity, and the fact has been laid hold of to throw doubt on the narratives; but it

is very natural that similarity of position and training should have produced similarity of thought; and that three or four such persons should have come in contact with Jesus and His Apostles makes no violent demands on probability, while there was no occasion to mention others who were not like-minded. Quartered for considerable periods in the country, and brought into close contact with its religion, and profoundly sceptical of their own, as all but the lowest minds then were, Cornelius and his brother in arms and spirit whose faith drew wondering praise from Jesus, are bright examples of the possibility of earnest religious life being nourished amid grave disadvantages, and preach a lesson, often neglected, that we should be slow to form unfavourable opinions of classes of men, or to decide that those of such and such a profession, or in such and such circumstances, must be of such and such a character.

It would have seemed that the last place to look for the first Gentile Christian would have been in the barracks at Cæsarea; and yet there God's angel went for him, and found him. It has often been discussed whether Cornelius was a 'proselyte' or not. It matters very little. He was drawn to the Jews' religion, had adopted their hours of prayer, revered their God, had therefore cast off idolatry, gave alms to the people as acknowledgment that their God was his God, and cultivated habitual devotion, which he had diffused among his household, both of slaves and soldiers. It is a beautiful picture of a soul feeling after a deeper knowledge of God, as a plant turns its half-opened flowers to the sun.

Such seekers do not grope without touching. It is not only 'unto the seed of Jacob' that God has never said,

‘Seek ye Me in vain.’ The story has a message of hope to all such seekers, and sheds precious light on dark problems in regard to the relation of such souls in heathen lands to the light and love of God. The vision appeared to Cornelius in the manner corresponding to his spiritual susceptibility, and it came at the hour of prayer. God’s angels ever draw near to hearts opened by desire to receive them. Not in visible form, but in reality, ‘bright-harnessed angels stand’ all around the chamber where prayer is made. Our hours of supplication are God’s hours of communication.

The vision to Cornelius is not to be whittled down to a mental impression. It was an objective, supernatural appearance,—whether to sense or soul matters little. The story gives most graphically the fixed gaze of terror which Cornelius fastened on the angel, and very characteristically the immediate recovery and quick question to which his courage and military promptitude helped him. ‘What is it, Lord?’ does not speak of terror, but of readiness to take orders and obey. ‘Lord’ seems to be but a title of reverence here.

In the angel’s answer, the order in which prayers and alms are named is the reverse of that in verse 2. Luke speaks as a man, beginning with the visible manifestation, and passing thence to the inward devotion which animated the external beneficence. The angel speaks as God sees, beginning with the inward, and descending to the outward. The strong ‘anthropomorphism’ of the representation that man’s prayer and alms keep God in mind of him needs no vindication and little explanation. It substitutes the mental state which in us originates certain acts for the acts themselves. God’s ‘remembrance’ is in Scripture frequently used to

express His loving deeds, which show that their recipient is not forgotten of Him.

But the all-important truth in the words is that the prayers and alms (coming from a devout heart) of a man who had never heard of Jesus Christ were acceptable to God. None the less Cornelius needed Jesus, and the recompense made to him was the knowledge of the Saviour. The belief that in many a heathen heart such yearning after a dimly known God has stretched itself towards light, and been accepted of God, does not in the least conflict with the truth that 'there is none other Name given among men, whereby we must be saved,' but it sheds a bright and most welcome light of hope into that awful darkness. Christ is the only Saviour, but it is not for us to say how far off from the channel in which it flows the water of life may percolate, and feed the roots of distant trees. Cornelius's religion was not a substitute for Christ, but was the occasion of his being led to Christ, and finding full, conscious salvation there. God leads seeking souls by His own wonderful ways; and we may leave all such in His hand, assured that no heart ever hungered after righteousness and was not filled.

The instruction to send for Peter tested Cornelius's willingness to be taught by an unknown Jew, and his belief in the divine origin of the vision. The direction given by which to find this teacher was not promising. A lodger in a tan-yard by the seaside was certainly not a man of position or wealth. But military discipline helped religious reverence; and without delay, as soon as the angel 'was departed' (an expression which gives the outward reality of the appearance strongly), Cornelius's confidential servants, sympathisers with him in his religion, were told all the story, and before

nightfall were on their march to Joppa. Swift obedience to whatever God points out as our path towards the light, even if it seem somewhat unattractive, will always mark our conduct if we really long for the light, and believe that He is pointing our way.

II. The vision which guided the light-bearer to the seeker.—All through the night the messengers marched along the maritime plain in which both Cæsarea and Joppa lay, much discussing, no doubt, their strange errand, and wondering what they would find. The preparation of Peter, which was as needful as that of Cornelius, was so timed as to be completed just as the messengers stood at the tanner's door.

The first point to note in regard to it is its scene. It is of subordinate importance, but it can scarcely have been entirely unmeaning, that the flashing waters of the Mediterranean, blazing in midday sunshine, stretched before Peter's eyes as he sat on the housetop 'by the seaside.' His thoughts may have travelled across the sea, and he may have wondered what lay beyond the horizon, and whether there were men there to whom Christ's commission extended. 'The isles' of which prophecy had told that they should 'wait for His law' were away out in the mysterious distance. Some expansion of spirit towards regions beyond may have accompanied his gaze. At all events, it was by the shore of the great highway of nations and of truth that the vision which revealed that all men were 'cleansed' filled the eye and heart of the Apostle, and told him that, in his calling as 'fisher of men,' a wider water than the land-locked Sea of Galilee was his.

We may also note the connection of the form of the vision with his circumstances. His hunger determined its shape. The natural bodily sensations coloured his

state of mind even in trance, and afforded the point of contact for God's message. It does not follow that the vision was only the consequence of his hunger, as has been suggested by critics who wish to get rid of the supernatural. But the form which it took teaches us how mercifully God is wont to mould His communications according to our needs, and how wisely He shapes them, so as to find entrance through even the lower wants. The commonest bodily needs may become avenues for His truth, if our prayer accompanies our hunger.

The significance of the vision is plain to us, though Peter was 'much perplexed' about it. In the light of the event, we understand that the 'great sheet let down from heaven by four corners,' and containing all manner of creatures, is the symbol of universal humanity (to use modern language). The four corners correspond to the four points of the compass,—north, south, east, and west,—the contents to the swarming millions of men. Peter would perceive no more in the command to 'kill and eat' than the abrogation of Mosaic restrictions. Meditation was needful to disclose the full extent of the revolution shadowed by the vision and its accompanying words. The old nature of Peter was not so completely changed but that a flash of it breaks out still. The same self-confidence which had led him to 'rebuke' Jesus, and to say, 'This shall not be unto Thee,' speaks in his unhesitating and irreverent 'Not so, Lord!'

The naïve reason he gives for not obeying—namely, his never having done as he was now bid to do—is charmingly illogical and human. God tells him to do a new thing, and his reason for not doing it is that it is new. Use and wont are set up by us all against the

fresh disclosures of God's will. The command to kill and eat was not repeated. It was but the introduction to the truth which was repeated thrice, the same number of times as Peter had denied his Master and had received his charge to feed His sheep.

That great truth has manifold applications, but its direct purpose as regards Peter is to teach that all restrictions which differentiated Jew from Gentile are abolished. 'Cleansing' does not here apply to moral purifying, but to the admission of all mankind to the same standing as the Jew. Therefore the Gospel is to be preached to all men, and the Jewish Christian has no pre-eminence.

Peter's perplexity as to the meaning of the vision is very intelligible. It was not so plain as to carry its own interpretation, but, like most other of God's teachings, was explained by circumstances. What was next done made the best commentary on what had just been beheld. While patient reflection is necessary to do due honour to God's teachings and to discover their bearing on events, it is generally true that events unfold their significance as meditation alone never can. Life is the best commentator on God's word. The three men down at the door poured light on the vision on the housetop. But the explanation was not left to circumstances. The Spirit directed Peter to go with the messengers, and thus taught him the meaning of the enigmatical words which he had heard from heaven.

It is to be remembered that the Apostle had no need of fresh illumination as to the world-wide preaching of the Gospel. Christ's commission to 'the uttermost parts of the earth' ever rang in his ears, as we may be sure. But what he did need was the lesson that

the Gentiles could come into the Church without going through the gate of Judaism. If all peculiar sanctity was gone from the Jew, and all men shared in the 'cleansing,' there was no need for keeping up any of the old restrictions, or insisting on Gentiles being first received into the Israelitish community as a stage in their progress towards Christianity.

It took Peter and the others years to digest the lesson given on the housetop, but he began to put it in practice that day. How little he knew the sweep of the truth then declared to him! How little we have learned it yet! All exclusiveness which looks down on classes or races, all monkish asceticism which taboos natural appetites and tastes, all morbid scrupulosity which shuts out from religious men large fields of life, all Pharisaism which says 'The temple of the Lord are we,' are smitten to dust by the great words which gather all men into the same ample, impartial divine love, and, in another aspect, give Christian culture and life the charter of freest use of all God's fair world, and place the distinction between clean and unclean in the spirit of the user rather than in the thing used. 'Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled . . . is nothing pure.'

'GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS'

'And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea-side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 33. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. 34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35. But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. 36. The word which God sent

unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all;) 37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him. 39. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; 41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. 42. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. 44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.'—Acts x. 30-44.

THIS passage falls into three parts: Cornelius's explanation, Peter's sermon, and the descent of the Spirit on the new converts. The last is the most important, and yet is told most briefly. We may surely recognise the influence of Peter's personal reminiscences in the scale of the narrative, and may remember that Luke and Mark were thrown together in later days.

I. Cornelius repeats what his messengers had already told Peter, but in fuller detail. He tells how he was occupied when the angel appeared. He was keeping the Jewish hour of prayer, and the fact that the vision came to him as he prayed had attested to him its heavenly origin. If we would see angels, the most likely place to behold them is in the secret place of prayer. He tells, too, that the command to send for Peter was a consequence of God's remembrance of his prayer ('therefore,' verse 32). His prayers and alms showed that he was 'of the light,' and therefore he was directed to what would yield further light.

The command to send for Peter is noteworthy in two respects. It was, first, a test of humility and obedience. Cornelius, as a Roman officer, would be tempted to feel the usual contempt for one of the subject race, and, unless his eagerness to know more of God's will overbore his pride, to kick at the idea of sending to beg the

favour of the presence and instruction of a Jew, and of one, too, who could find no better quarters than a tanner's house. The angel's voice commanded, but it did not compel. Cornelius bore the test, and neither waived aside the vision as a hallucination to which it was absurd for a practical man to attend, nor recoiled from the lowliness of the proposed teacher. He pocketed official and racial loftiness, and, as he emphasises, 'forthwith' despatched his message. It was as if an English official in the Punjab had been sent to a Sikh 'Guru' for teaching.

The other remarkable point about the command is that Philip was probably in Cæsarea at the time. Why should Peter have been brought, then, by two visions and two long journeys? The subsequent history explains why. For the storm of criticism in the Jerusalem church provoked by Cornelius's baptism would have raged with tenfold fury if so revolutionary an act had been done by any less authoritative person than the leader of the Apostles. The Lord would stamp His own approval on the deed which marked so great an expansion of the Church, and therefore He makes the first of the Apostles His agent, and that by a double vision.

'Thou hast well done that thou art come,'—a courteous welcome, with just a trace of the doubt which had occupied Cornelius during the 'four days,' whether this unknown Jew would obey so strange an invitation. Courtesy and preparedness to receive the unknown message beautifully blend in Cornelius's closing words, which do not directly ask Peter to speak, but declare the auditors' eagerness to hear, as well as their confidence that what he says will be God's voice.

A variant reading in verse 33 gives 'in thy sight' for 'in the sight of God,' and has much to recommend it. But in any case we have here the right attitude for us all in the presence of the uttered will and mind of God. Where such open-eared and open-hearted preparedness marks the listeners, feebler teachers than Peter will win converts. The reason why much earnest Christian teaching is vain is the indifference and non-expectant attitude of the hearers, who are not hearers. Seed thrown on the wayside is picked up by the birds.

II. Peter's sermon is, on the whole, much like his other addresses which are abundantly reported in the early part of the Acts. The great business of the preachers then was to tell the history of Jesus. Christianity is, first, a recital of historical events, from which, no doubt, principles are deduced, and which necessarily lead on to doctrines; but the facts are first.

But the familiar story is told to Cornelius with some variation of tone. And it is prefaced by a great word, which crystallises the large truth that had sprung into consciousness and startling power in Peter, as the result of his own and Cornelius's experience. He had not previously thought of God as 'a respecter of persons,' but the conviction that He was not had never blazed with such sun-clearness before him as it did now. Jewish narrowness had, unconsciously to himself, somewhat clouded it; but these four days had burned in on him, as if it were a new truth, that 'in every nation' there may be men accepted of God, because they 'fear Him and work righteousness.'

That great saying is twisted from its right meaning when it is interpreted as discouraging the efforts of Christians to carry the Gospel to the heathen; for, if the 'light of nature' is sufficient, what was Peter sent

to Cæsarea for? But it is no less maltreated when evangelical Christians fail to grasp its world-wide significance, or doubt that in lands where Christ's name has not been proclaimed there are souls groping for the light, and seeking to obey the law written on their hearts. That there are such, and that such are 'accepted of Him,' and led by His own ways to the fuller light, is obviously taught in these words, and should be a welcome thought to us all.

The tangled utterances which immediately follow, sound as if speech staggered under the weight of the thoughts opening before the speaker. Whatever difficulty attends the construction, the intention is clear,—to contrast the limited scope of the message, as confined to the children of Israel, with its universal destination as now made clear. The statement which in the Authorised and Revised Versions is thrown into a parenthesis is really the very centre of the Apostle's thought. Jesus, who has hitherto been preached to Israel, is 'Lord of all,' and the message concerning Him is now to be proclaimed, not in vague outline and at second hand, as it had hitherto reached Cornelius, but in full detail, and as a message in which he was concerned.

Contrast the beginning and the ending of the discourse,—'the word sent unto the children of Israel' and 'every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.' A remarkable variation in the text is suggested by Blass in his striking commentary, who would omit 'Lord' and read, 'The word which He sent to the children of Israel, bringing the good tidings of peace through Jesus Christ,—this [word] belongs to all.' That reading does away with the chief difficulties, and brings out clearly the thought which is more

obscurely expressed in a contorted sentence by the present reading.

The subsequent *résumé* of the life of Jesus is substantially the same as is found in Peter's other sermons. But we may note that the highest conceptions of our Lord's nature are not stated. It is hard to suppose that Peter after Pentecost had not the same conviction as burned in his confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' But in these early discourses neither the Divinity and Incarnation nor the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is set forth. He is the Christ, 'anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.' God is with Him (Nicodemus had got as far as that). He is 'ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead.'

We note, too, that His teaching is not touched upon, nor any of the profounder aspects of His work as the Revealer of God, but His beneficence and miraculous deliverances of devil-ridden men. His death is declared, but without any of the accusations of His murderers, which, like lance-thrusts, 'pricked' Jewish hearers. Nor is the efficacy of that death as the sacrifice for the world's sin touched upon, but it is simply told as a fact, and set in contrast with the Resurrection. These were the plain facts which had first to be accepted.

The only way of establishing facts is by evidence of eye-witnesses. So Peter twice (verses 39, 41) adduces his own and his colleagues' evidence. But the facts are not yet a gospel, unless they are further explained as well as established. Did such things happen? The answer is, 'We saw them.' What did they mean? The answer begins by adducing the 'witness' of the Apostles to a different order of truths, which requires a different sort of witness. Jesus had bidden them

'testify' that He is to be Judge of living and dead; that is, of all mankind. Their witness to that can only rest on His word.

Nor is that all. There is yet another body of 'witnesses' to yet another class of truths. 'All the prophets' bear witness to the great truth which makes the biography of the Man the gospel for all men,—that the deepest want of all men is satisfied through the name which Peter ever rang out as all-powerful to heal and bless. The forgiveness of sins through the manifested character and work of Jesus Christ is given on condition of faith to any and every one who believes, be he Jew or Gentile, Galilean fisherman or Roman centurion. Cornelius may have known little of the prophets, but he knew the burden of sin. He did not know all that we know of Jesus, and of the way in which forgiveness is connected with His work, but he did know now that it was connected, and that this Jesus was risen from the dead, and was to be the Judge. His faith went out to that Saviour, and as he heard he believed.

III. Therefore the great gift, attesting the divine acceptance of him and the rest of the hearers, came at once. There had been no confession of their faith, much less had there been baptism, or laying on of Apostolic hands. The sole qualification and condition for the reception of the Spirit which John lays down in his Gospel when he speaks of the 'Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive,' was present here, and it was enough. Peter and his brethren might have hesitated about baptizing an uncircumcised believer. The Lord of the Church showed Peter that He did not hesitate.

So, like a true disciple, Peter followed Christ's lead,

and though 'they of the circumcision' were struck with amazement, he said to himself, 'Who am I, that I should withstand God?' and opened his heart to welcome these new converts as possessors of 'like precious faith,' as was demonstrated by their possession of the same Spirit. Would that Peter's willingness to recognise all who manifest the Spirit of Christ, whatever their relation to ecclesiastical regulations, had continued the law and practice of the Church!

PETER'S APOLOGIA

'And the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3. Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay, and eat. 8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. 12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14. Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'—ACTS XI. 1-18.

PETER'S action in regard to Cornelius precipitated a controversy which was bound to come if the Church was to be anything more than a Jewish sect. It brought to light the first tendency to form a party in the Church. 'They . . . of the circumcision' were

probably 'certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed,' and were especially zealous for all the separating prescriptions of the ceremonial law. They were scarcely a party as yet, but the little rift was destined to grow, and they became Paul's bitterest opponents through all his life, dogging him with calumnies and counterworking his toil. It is a black day for a Church when differences of opinion lead to the formation of cliques. Zeal for truth is sadly apt to enlist spite, malice, and blindness to a manifest work of God, as its allies.

Poor Peter, no doubt, expected that the brethren would rejoice with him in the extension of the Gospel to 'the Gentiles,' but his reception in Jerusalem was very unlike his hopes. The critics did not venture to cavil at his preaching to Gentiles. Probably none of them had any objection to such being welcomed into the Church, for they can scarcely have wished to make the door into it narrower than that into the synagogue, but they insisted that there was no way in but through the synagogue. By all means, said they, let Gentiles come, but they must first become Jews, by submitting to circumcision and living as Jews do. Thus they did not attack Peter for preaching to the Roman centurion and his men, but for eating with them. That eating not only was a breach of the law, but it implied the reception of Cornelius and his company into the household of God, and so destroyed the whole fabric of Jewish exclusiveness. We condemn such narrowness, but do many of us not practise it in other forms? Wherever Christians demand adoption of external usages, over and above exercise of penitent faith, as a condition of brotherly recognition, they are walking in the steps of them 'of the circumcision.'

Peter's answer to the critics is the true answer to all similar hedging up of the Church, for he contents himself with showing that he was only following God's action in every step of the way which he took, and that God, by the gift of the divine Spirit, had shown that He had taken these uncircumcised men into His fellowship, before Peter dared to 'eat with them.' He points to four facts which show God's hand in the matter, and thinks that he has done enough to vindicate himself thereby. The first is his vision on the housetop. He tells that he was praying when it came, and what God shows to a praying spirit is not likely to mislead. He tells that he was 'in a trance,'—a condition in which prophets had of old received their commands. That again was a guarantee for the divine origin of the vision in the eyes of every Jew, though nowadays it is taken by anti-supernaturalists as a demonstration of its morbidity and unreliability. He tells of his reluctance to obey the command to 'kill and eat.' A flash of the old brusque spirit impelled his flat refusal, 'Not so, Lord!' and his daring to argue with his Lord still, as he had done with Him on earth. He tells of the interpreting and revolutionary word, evoked by his audacious objection, and then he tells how 'this was done thrice,' so that there could be no mistake in his remembrance of it, and then that the whole was drawn up into heaven,—a sign that the purpose of the vision was accomplished when that word was spoken. What, then, was the meaning of it?

Clearly it swept away at once the legal distinction of clean and unclean meats, and of it, too, may be spoken what Mark, Peter's mouthpiece, writes of earthly words of Christ's: 'This He said, making all meats clean.' But with the sweeping away of that

distinction much else goes, for it necessarily involves the abrogation of the whole separating ordinances of the law, and of the distinction between clean and unclean persons. Its wider application was not seen at the moment, but it flashed on him, no doubt, when face to face with Cornelius. God had cleansed him, in that his prayers had 'gone up for a memorial before God,' and so Peter saw that 'in every nation,' and not among Jews only, there might be men cleansed by God. What was true of Cornelius must be true of many others. So the whole distinction between Jew and Gentile was cut up by the roots. Little did Peter know the width of the principle revealed to him then, as all of us know but little of the full application of many truths which we believe. But he obeyed so much of the command as he understood, and more of it gradually dawned on his mind, as will always be the case if we obey what we know.

The second fact was the coincident arrival of the messengers and the distinct command to accompany them. Peter could distinguish quite assuredly his own thoughts from divine instructions, as his account of the dialogue in the trance shows. How he distinguished is not told; that he distinguished is. The coincidence in time clearly pointed to one divine hand working at both ends of the line,—Cæsarea and Joppa. It interpreted the vision which had 'much perplexed' Peter as to what it 'might mean.' But he was not left to interpret it by his own pondering. The Spirit spoke authoritatively, and the whole force of his justification of himself depends on the fact that he knew that the impulse which made him set out to Cæsarea was not his own. If the reading of the Revised Version is adopted in verse 12, 'making no distinction,' the

command plainly referred to the vision, and showed Peter that he was to make no distinction of 'clean and unclean' in his intercourse with these Gentiles.

The third fact is the vision to Cornelius, of which he was told on arriving. The two visions fitted into each other, confirmed each other, interpreted each other. We may estimate the greatness of the step in the development of the Church which the admission of Cornelius into it made, and the obstacles on both sides, by the fact that both visions were needed to bring these two men together. Peter would never have dreamed of going with the messengers if he had not had his narrowness beaten out of him on the house-top, and Cornelius would never have dreamed of sending to Joppa if he had not seen the angel. The cleft between Jew and Gentile was so wide that God's hand had to be applied on both sides to press the separated parts together. He had plainly done it, and that was Peter's defence.

The fourth fact is the gift of the Spirit to these Gentiles. That is the crown of Peter's vindication, and his question, 'Who was I, that I could withstand God?' might be profitably pondered and applied by those whose ecclesiastical theories oblige them to deny the 'orders' and the 'validity of the sacraments,' and the very name of a Church, to bodies of Christians who do not conform to their polity. If God, by the gift of His Spirit manifest in its fruits, owns them, they have the true 'notes of the Church,' and 'they of the circumcision' who recoil from recognising them do themselves more harm thereby than they inflict on these. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God,' even though some brother may be 'angry' that the Father welcomes them.

THE FIRST PREACHING AT ANTIOCH

'And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.'—Acts xi. 20, 21.

THUS simply does the historian tell one of the greatest events in the history of the Church. How great it was will appear if we observe that the weight of authority among critics and commentators sees here an extension of the message of salvation to Greeks, that is, to pure heathens, and not a mere preaching to Hellenists, that is, to Greek-speaking Jews born outside Palestine.

If that be correct, this was a great stride forward in the development of the Church. It needed a vision to overcome the scruples of Peter, and impel him to the bold innovation of preaching to Cornelius and his household, and, as we know, his doing so gave grave offence to some of his brethren in Jerusalem. But in the case before us, some Cypriote and African Jews—men of no note in the Church, whose very names have perished, with no official among them, with no vision nor command to impel them, with no precedent to encourage them, with nothing but the truth in their minds and the impulses of Christ's love in their hearts—solve the problem of the extension of Christ's message to the heathen, and, quite unconscious of the greatness of their act, do the thing about the propriety of which there had been such serious question in Jerusalem.

This boldness becomes even more remarkable if we notice that the incident of our text may have taken place before Peter's visit to Cornelius. The verse

before our text, 'They which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled, . . . preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only,' is almost a *verbatim* repetition of words in an earlier chapter, and evidently suggests that the writer is returning to that point of time, in order to take up another thread of his narrative contemporaneous with those already pursued. If so, three distinct lines of expansion appear to have started from the dispersion of the Jerusalem church in the persecution—namely, Philip's mission to Samaria, Peter's to Cornelius, and this work in Antioch. Whether prior in time or no, the preaching in the latter city was plainly quite independent of the other two. It is further noteworthy that this, the effort of a handful of unnamed men, was the true 'leader'—the shoot that grew. Philip's work, and Peter's so far as we know, were side branches, which came to little; this led on to a church at Antioch, and so to Paul's missionary work, and all that came of that.

The incident naturally suggests some thoughts bearing on the general subject of Christian work, which we now briefly present.

I. Notice the spontaneous impulse which these men obeyed.

Persecution drove the members of the Church apart, and, as a matter of course, wherever they went they took their faith with them, and, as a matter of course, spoke about it. The coals were scattered from the hearth in Jerusalem by the armed heel of violence. That did not put the fire out, but only spread it, for wherever they were flung they kindled a blaze. These men had no special injunction 'to preach the Lord Jesus.' They do not seem to have adopted this line of

action deliberately, or of set purpose. 'They believed, and therefore spoke.' A spontaneous impulse, and nothing more, leads them on. They find themselves rejoicing in a great Saviour-Friend. They see all around them men who need Him, and that is enough. They obey the promptings of the voice within, and lay the foundations of the first Gentile Church.

Such a spontaneous impulse is ever the natural result of our own personal possession of Christ. In regard to worldly good the instinct, except when overcome by higher motives, is to keep the treasure to oneself. But even in the natural sphere there are possessions which to have is to long to impart, such as truth and knowledge. And in the spiritual sphere, it is emphatically the case that real possession is always accompanied by a longing to impart. The old prophet spoke a universal truth when he said: 'Thy word was as a fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.' If we have found Christ for ourselves, we shall undoubtedly wish to speak forth our knowledge of His love. Convictions which are deep demand expression. Emotion which is strong needs utterance. If our hearts have any fervour of love to Christ in them, it will be as natural to tell it forth, as tears are to sorrow or smiles to happiness. True, there is a reticence in profound feeling, and sometimes the deepest love can only 'love and be silent,' and there is a just suspicion of loud or vehement protestations of Christian emotion, as of any emotion. But for all that, it remains true that a heart warmed with the love of Christ needs to express its love, and will give it forth, as certainly as light must radiate from its centre, or heat from a fire.

Then, true kindness of heart creates the same

impulse. We cannot truly possess the treasure for ourselves without pity for those who have it not. Surely there is no stranger contradiction than that Christian men and women can be content to keep Christ as if He were their special property, and have their spirits untouched into any likeness of His divine pity for the multitudes who were as 'sheep having no shepherd.' What kind of Christians must they be who think of Christ as 'a Saviour for me,' and take no care to set Him forth as 'a Saviour for you'? What should we think of men in a shipwreck who were content to get into the lifeboat, and let everybody else drown? What should we think of people in a famine feasting sumptuously on their private stores, whilst women were boiling their children for a meal and men fighting with dogs for garbage on the dunghills? 'He that withholdeth bread, the people shall curse him.' What of him who withholds the Bread of Life, and all the while claims to be a follower of the Christ, who gave His flesh for the life of the world?

Further, loyalty to Christ creates the same impulse. If we are true to our Lord, we shall feel that we cannot but speak up and out for Him, and that all the more where His name is unloved and unhonoured. He has left His good fame very much in our hands, and the very same impulse which hurries words to our lips when we hear the name of an absent friend calumniated should make us speak for Him. He is a doubtfully loyal subject who, if he lives among rebels, is afraid to show his colours. He is already a coward, and is on the way to be a traitor. Our Master has made us His witnesses. He has placed in our hands, as a sacred deposit, the honour of His name. He has entrusted to us, as His selectest sign of confidence, the

carrying out of the purposes for which on earth His blood was shed, on which in heaven His heart is set. How can we be loyal to Him if we are not forced by a mighty constraint to respond to His great tokens of trust in us, and if we know nothing of that spirit which said: 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' I do not say that a man cannot be a Christian unless he knows and obeys this impulse. But, at least, we may safely say that he is a very weak and imperfect Christian who does not.

II. This incident suggests the universal obligation on all Christians to make known Christ.

These men were not officials. In these early days the Church had a very loose organisation. But the fugitives in our narrative seem to have had among them none even of the humble office-bearers of primitive times. Neither had they any command or commission from Jerusalem. No one there had given them authority, or, as would appear, knew anything of their proceedings. Could there be a more striking illustration of the great truth that whatever varieties of function may be committed to various officers in the Church, the work of telling Christ's love to men belongs to every one who has found it for himself or herself? 'This honour have all the saints.'

Whatever may be our differences of opinion as to Church order and offices, they need not interfere with our firm grasp of this truth. 'Preaching Christ,' in the sense in which that expression is used in the New Testament, implies no one special method of proclaiming the glad tidings. A word written in a letter to a friend, a sentence dropped in casual conversation, a lesson to a child on a mother's lap, or any other way by which, to any listeners, the great story of the Cross

is told, is as truly—often more truly—preaching Christ as the set discourse which has usurped the name.

We profess to believe in the priesthood of all believers, we are ready enough to assert it in opposition to sacerdotal assumptions. Are we as ready to recognise it as laying a very real responsibility upon us, and involving a very practical inference as to our own conduct? We all have the power, therefore we all have the duty. For what purpose did God give us the blessing of knowing Christ ourselves? Not for our own well-being alone, but that through us the blessing might be still further diffused.

‘Heaven doth with us as men with torches do,
Not light them for themselves.’

‘God hath shined into our hearts’ that we might give to others ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ Every Christian is solemnly bound to fulfil this divine intention, and to take heed to the imperative command, ‘Freely ye have received, freely give.’

III. Observe, further, the simple message which they proclaimed.

‘Preaching the Lord Jesus,’ says the text—or more accurately perhaps—‘preaching Jesus as Lord.’ The substance, then, of their message was just this—proclamation of the person and dignity of their Master, the story of the human life of the Man, the story of the divine sacrifice and self-bestowment by which He had bought the right of supreme rule over every heart; and the urging of His claims on all who heard of His love. And this, their message, was but the proclamation of their own personal experience. They had found Jesus to be for themselves Lover and Lord, Friend

and Saviour of their souls, and the joy they had received they sought to share with these Greeks, worshippers of gods and lords many.

Surely anybody can deliver that message who has had that experience. All have not the gifts which would fit for public speech, but all who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious' can somehow tell how gracious He is. The first Christian sermon was very short, and it was very efficacious, for it 'brought to Jesus' the whole congregation. Here it is: 'He first findeth his brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias.' Surely we can all say that, if we have found Him. Surely we shall all long to say it, if we are glad that we have found Him, and if we love our brother.

Notice, too, how simple the form as well as the substance of the message. '*They spake.*' It was no set address, no formal utterance, but familiar, natural talk to ones and twos, as opportunity offered. The form was so simple that we may say that there was none. What we want is that Christian people should speak anyhow. What does the shape of the cup matter? What does it matter whether it be gold or clay? The main thing is that it shall bear the water of life to some thirsty lip. All Christians have to preach, as the word is used here, that is, to tell the good news. Their task is to carry a message—no refinement of words is needed for that—arguments are not needed. They have to tell it simply and faithfully, as one who only cares to repeat what he has had given to him. They have to tell it confidently, as having proved it true. They have to tell it beseechingly, as loving the souls to whom they bring it. Surely we can all do that, if we ourselves are living on Christ and have drunk into His Spirit. Let His mighty salva-

tion, experienced by yourselves, be the substance of your message, and let the form of it be guided by the old words, 'It shall be, when the Spirit of the Lord is come upon thee, that thou shalt do as occasion shall serve thee.'

IV. Notice, lastly, the mighty Helper who prospered their work.

'The hand of the Lord was with them.' The very keynote of this Book of the Acts is the work of the ascended Christ in and for His Church. At every turning-point in the history, and throughout the whole narratives, forms of speech like this occur, bearing witness to the profound conviction of the writer that Christ's active energy was with His servants, and Christ's Hand the origin of all their security and of all their success.

So this is a statement of a permanent and universal fact. We do not labour alone; however feeble our hands, that mighty Hand is laid on them to direct their movements and to lend strength to their weakness. It is not our speech which will secure results, but His presence with our words which will bring it about that even through them a great number shall believe and turn to the Lord. There is our encouragement when we are despondent. There is our rebuke when we are self-confident. There is our stimulus when we are indolent. There is our quietness when we are impatient. If ever we are tempted to think our task heavy, let us not forget that He who set it helps us to do it, and from His throne shares in all our toils, the Lord still, as of old, working with us. If ever we feel that our strength is nothing, and that we stand solitary against many foes, let us fall back upon the peace-giving thought that one man against the world, with

Christ to help him, is always in the majority, and let us leave issues of our work in His hands, whose hand will guard the seed sown in weakness, whose smile will bless the springing thereof.

How little any of us know what will become of our poor work, under His fostering care! How little these men knew that they were laying the foundations of the great change which was to transform the Christian community from a Jewish sect into a world-embracing Church! So is it ever. We know not what we do when simply and humbly we speak His name. The far-reaching results escape our eyes. Then, sow the seed, and He will 'give it a body as it pleaseth Him.' On earth we may never know the fruits of our labours. They will be among the surprises of heaven, where many a solitary worker shall exclaim with wonder, as he looks on the hitherto unknown children whom God hath given him, 'Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?' Then, though our names may have perished from earthly memories, like those of the simple fugitives of Cyprus and Cyrene, who 'were the first that ever burst' into the night of heathendom with the torch of the Gospel in their hands, they will be written in the Lamb's book of life, and He will confess them in the presence of His Father in heaven.

THE EXHORTATION OF BARNABAS¹

¹ Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.—ACTS xi. 23.

THE first purely heathen converts had been brought into the Church by the nameless men of Cyprus and Cyrene, private persons with no office or commission

¹ Preached before the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

to preach, who, in simple obedience to the instincts of a Christian heart, leaped the barrier which seemed impassable to the Church in Jerusalem, and solved the problem over which Apostles were hesitating. Barnabas is sent down to see into this surprising new phenomenon, and his mission, though probably not hostile, was, at all events, one of inquiry and doubt. But like a true man, he yielded to facts, and widened his theory to suit them. He saw the tokens of Christian life in these Gentile converts, and that compelled him to admit that the Church was wider than some of his friends in Jerusalem thought. A pregnant lesson for modern theorists who, on one ground or another of doctrine or of orders, narrow the great conception of Christ's Church! Can you see 'the grace of God' in the people? Then they are in the Church, whatever becomes of your theories, and the sooner you let them out so as to fit the facts, the better for you and for them.

Satisfied as to their true Christian character, Barnabas sets himself to help them to grow. Now, remember how recently they had been converted; how, from their Gentile origin, they can have had next to no systematic instruction; how the taint of heathen morals, such as were common in that luxurious, corrupt Antioch, must have clung to them; how unformed must have been their loose Church organisation—and remembering all this, think of this one exhortation as summing up all that Barnabas had to say to them. He does not say, Do this, or Believe that, or Organise the other; but he says, Stick to Jesus Christ the Lord. On this commandment hangs all the law; it is the one all-inclusive summary of the duties of the Christian life.

So, brethren and fathers, I venture to take these words now, as containing large lessons for us all, appropriate at all times, and especially in a sermon on such an occasion as the present.

We may deal with the thoughts suggested by these words very simply, just looking at the points as they lie—what Barnabas *saw*, what he *felt*, what he *said*.

I. What Barnabas saw.

The grace of God here has very probably the specific meaning of the miracle-working gift of the Holy Spirit. That is rendered probable by the analogy of other instances recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, such as Peter's experience at Cæsarea, where all his hesitations and reluctance were swept away when 'the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning, and they spake with tongues.' If so, what convinced Barnabas that these uncircumcised Gentiles were Christians like himself, may have been their similar possession of the visible and audible effects of that gift of God. But the language does not compel this interpretation; and the absence of all distinct reference to these extraordinary powers as existing there, among the new converts at Antioch, may be intended to mark a difference in the nature of the evidence. At any rate, the possibly intentional generality of the expression is significant and fairly points to an extension of the spiritual gifts much beyond the limits of miraculous powers. There are other ways by which the grace of God may be seen and heard, thank God! than by speaking with tongues and working miracles; and the first lesson of our text is that wherever that grace is made visible by its appropriate manifestations, there we are to recognise a brother.

Augustine said, 'Where Christ is there is the Church,

and that is true, but vague; for the question still remains, 'And where is Christ?' The only satisfying answer is, Christ is wherever Christlike men manifest a life drawn from, and kindred with, His life. And so the true form of the dictum for practical purposes comes to be: 'Where the grace of Christ is visible, there is the Church.'

That great truth is sinned against and denied in many ways. Most chiefly, perhaps, by the successors in modern garb of the more Jewish portion of that Church at Jerusalem who sent Barnabas to Antioch. They had no objection to Gentiles entering the Church, but they must come in by the way of circumcision; they quite believed that it was Christ who saved, and His grace which sanctified, but they thought that His grace would only flow in a given channel; and so do their modern representatives, who exalt sacraments, and consequently priests, to the same place as the Judaizers in the early Church did the rite of the old Covenant. Such teachers have much to say about the notes of the Church, and have elaborated a complicated system of identification by which you may know the genuine article, and unmask impostors. The attempt is about as wise as to try to weave a network fine enough to keep back a stream. The water will flow through the closest meshes, and when Christ pours out the Spirit, He is apt to do it in utter disregard of notes of the Church, and of channels of sacramental grace.

We Congregationalists, who have no orders, no sacraments, no Apostolic succession; who in order not to break loose from Christ and conscience have had to break loose from 'Catholic tradition,' and have been driven to separation by the true schismatics, who have

insisted on another bond of Church unity than union to Christ, are denied nowadays a place in His Church.

The true answer to all that arrogant assumption and narrow pedantry which confine the free flow of the water of life to the conduits of sacraments and orders, and will only allow the wind that bloweth where it listeth to make music in the pipes of their organs, is simply the homely one which shivered a corresponding theory to atoms in the fair open mind of Barnabas.

The Spirit of Christ at work in men's hearts, making them pure and gentle, simple and unworldly, refining their characters, elevating their aims, toning their whole being into accord with the music of His life, is the true proof that men are Christians, and that communities of such men are Churches of His. Mysterious efficacy is claimed for Christian ordinances. Well, the question is a fair one: Is the type of Christian character produced within these sacred limits, which we are hopelessly outside, conspicuously higher and more manifestly Christlike than that nourished by no sacraments, and grown not under glass, but in the unsheltered open? Has not God set His seal on these communities to which we belong? With many faults for which we have to be, and are, humble before Him, we can point to the lineaments of the family likeness, and say, 'Are they Hebrews? so are we. Are they Israelites? so are we. Are they the seed of Abraham? so are we.'

Once get that truth wrought into men's minds, that the true test of Christianity is the visible presence of a grace in character which is evidently God's, and whole mountains of prejudice and error melt away. We are just as much in danger of narrowing the Church in

accordance with our narrowness as any 'sacramentarian' of them all. We are tempted to think that no good thing can grow up under the baleful shadow of that tree, a sacerdotal Christianity. We are tempted to think that all the good people are Dissenters, just as Churchmen are to think that nobody can be a Christian who prays without a prayer-book. Our own type of denominational character—and there is such a thing—comes to be accepted by us as the all but exclusive ideal of a devout man; and we have not imagination enough to conceive, nor charity enough to believe in, the goodness which does not speak our dialect, nor see with our eyes. Dogmatical narrowness has built as high walls as ceremonial Christianity has reared round the fold of Christ. And the one deliverance for us all from the transformed selfishness, which has so much to do with shaping all these wretched narrow theories of the Church, is to do as this man did—open our eyes with sympathetic eagerness to see God's grace in many an unexpected place, and square our theories with His dealings.

It used to be an axiom that there was no life in the sea beyond a certain limit of a few hundred feet. It was learnedly and conclusively demonstrated that pressure and absence of light, and I know not what beside, made life at greater depths impossible. It was proved that in such conditions creatures could not live. And then, when that was settled, the *Challenger* put down her dredge five miles, and brought up healthy and good-sized living things, with eyes in their heads, from that enormous depth. So, then, the savant had to ask, *How* can there be life? instead of asserting that there cannot be; and, no doubt, the answer will be forthcoming some day.

We have all been too much accustomed to set arbitrary limits to the diffusion of the life of Christ among men. Let us rather rejoice when we see forms of beauty, which bear the mark of His hand, drawn from depths that we deemed waste, and thankfully confess that the bounds of our expectation, and the framework of our institutions, do not confine the breadth of His working, nor the sweep of His grace.

II. What Barnabas felt.

‘He was glad.’ It was a triumph of Christian principle to recognise the grace of God under new forms, and in so strange a place. It was a still greater triumph to hail it with rejoicing. One need not have wondered if the acknowledgment of a fact, dead in the teeth of all his prejudices, and seemingly destructive of some profound convictions, had been somewhat grudging. Even a good, true man might have been bewildered and reluctant to let go so much as was destroyed by the admission—‘Then hath God granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life,’—and might have been pardoned if he had not been able to do more than acquiesce and hold his peace. We are scarcely just to these early Jewish Christians when we wonder at their hesitation on this matter, and are apt to forget the enormous strength of the prejudices and sacred conviction which they had to overcome. Hence the context seems to consider that the quick recognition of Christian character on the part of Barnabas, and his gladness at the discovery, need explanation, and so it adds, with special reference to these, as it would seem, ‘for he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,’ as if nothing short of such characteristics could have sufficiently emancipated him from the narrowness that would have refused to discern the

good, or the bitterness that would have been offended at it.

So, dear brethren, we may well test ourselves with this question : Does the discovery of the working of the grace of God outside the limits of our own Churches and communions excite a quick, spontaneous emotion of gladness in *our* hearts? It may upset some of our theories; it may teach us that things which we thought very important, 'distinctive principles' and the like, are not altogether as precious as we thought them; it may require us to give up some pleasant ideas of our superiority, and of the necessary conformity of all good people to our type. Are we willing to let them all go, and without a twinge of envy or a hanging back from prejudice, to welcome the discovery that 'God fulfils Himself in many ways'? Have we schooled ourselves to say honestly, 'Therein I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice'?

There is much to overcome if we would know this Christlike gladness. The good and the bad in us may both oppose it. The natural deeper interest in the well-being of the Churches of our own faith and order, the legitimate ties which unite us with these, our conscientious convictions, our friendships, the *esprit de corps* born of fighting shoulder to shoulder, will, of course, make our sympathies flow most quickly and deeply in denominational channels. And then come in abundance of less worthy motives, some altogether bad and some the exaggeration of what is good, and we get swallowed up in our own individual work, or in that of our 'denomination,' and have but a very tepid joy in anybody else's prosperity.

In almost every town of England, your Churches, and those to which I belong, with Presbyterians and

Wesleyans, stand side by side. The conditions of our work make some rivalry inevitable, and none of us, I suppose, object to that. It helps to keep us all diligent: a sturdy adherence to our several 'distinctive principles,' and an occasional hard blow in fair fight on their behalf we shall all insist upon. Our brotherhood is all the more real for frank speech, and 'the animated No!' is an essential in all intercourse which is not stagnant or mawkish. There is much true fellowship and much good feeling among all these. But we want far more of an honest rejoicing in each other's success, a quicker and truer manly sympathy with each other's work, a fuller consciousness of our solidarity in Christ, and a clearer exhibition of it before the world.

And on a wider view, as our eyes travel over the wide field of Christendom, and our memories go back over the long ages of the story of the Church, let gladness, and not wonder or reluctance, be the temper with which we see the graces of Christian character lifting their meek blossoms in corners strange to us, and breathing their fragrance over the pastures of the wilderness. In many a cloister, in many a hermit's cell, from amidst the smoke of incense, through the dust of controversies, we should see, and be glad to see, faces bright with the radiance caught from Christ. Let us set a jealous watch over our hearts that self-absorption, or denominationalism, or envy do not make the sight a pain instead of a joy; and let us remember that the eye-salve which will purge our dim sight to behold the grace of God in all its forms is that grace itself, which ever recognises its own kindred, and lives in the gladness of charity, and the joy of beholding a brother's good. If we are to have eyes to know the grace of God when we see it, and a heart to rejoice

when we know it, we must get them as Barnabas got his, and be good men, because we are full of the Holy Ghost, and full of the Holy Ghost because we are full of faith.

III. What Barnabas said.

‘He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.’ The first thing that strikes one about this all-sufficient directory for Christian life is the emphasis with which it sets forth ‘the Lord’ as the one object to be grasped and held. The sum of all objective Religion is Christ—the sum of all subjective Religion is cleaving to Him. A living Person to be laid hold of, and a personal relation to that Person, such is the conception of Religion, whether considered as revelation or as inward life, which underlies this exhortation. Whether we listen to His own words about Himself, and mark the altogether unprecedented way in which He was His own theme, and the unique decisiveness and plainness with which He puts His own personality before us as the Incarnate Truth, the pattern for all human conduct, the refuge and the rest for the world of weary ones; or whether we give ear to the teaching of His Apostles; from whatever point of view we approach Christianity, it all resolves itself into the person of Jesus Christ. He is the *Revelation* of God; theology, properly so called, is but the formulating of the facts which He gives us; and for the modern world the alternative is, Christ the manifested God, or no God at all, other than the shadow of a name. He is the perfect *Exemplar* of humanity! The law of life and the power to fulfil the law are both in Him; and the superiority of Christian morality consists not in this or that isolated precept, but in the embodiment of all goodness in His life, and in the new motive which He supplies for

keeping the commandment. Wrenched away from Him, Christian morality has no being. He is the sacrifice for the world, the salvation of which flows from what He does, and not merely from what He taught or was. His personality is the foundation of His work, and the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation is all contained in the name of Jesus.

There is a constant tendency to separate the results of Christ's life and death, whether considered as revelation, atonement, or ethics, from Him, and unconsciously to make these the sum of our Religion, and the object of our faith. Especially is this the case in times of restless thought and eager canvassing of the very foundations of religious belief, like the present. Therefore it is wholesome for us all to be brought back to the pregnant simplicity of the thought which underlies this text, and to mark how vividly these early Christians apprehended a living Lord as the sum and substance of all which they had to grasp.

There is a whole world between the man to whom God's revelation consists in certain doctrines given to us by Jesus Christ, and the man to whom it consists in that Christ Himself. Grasping a living person is not the same as accepting a proposition. True, the propositions are about Him, and we do not know Him without them. But equally true, we need to be reminded that *He* is our Saviour and not *they*, and that God has revealed Himself to us not in words and sentences but in a life.

For, alas! the doctrinal element has overborne the personal among all Churches and all schools of thought, and in the necessary process of formulating and systematising the riches which are in Jesus, we are all apt to confound the creeds with the Christ, and so to mani-

pulate Christianity until, instead of being the revelation of a Person and a gospel, it has become a system of divinity. Simple, devout souls have to complain that they cannot find even a dead Christ, to say nothing of a living one, for the theologians have 'taken away their Lord, and they know not where they have laid Him.'

It is, therefore, to be reckoned as a distinct gain that one result of the course of more recent thought, both among friends and foes, has been to make all men feel more than before, that all revelation is contained in the living person of Jesus Christ. So did the Church believe before creeds were. So it is coming to feel again, with a consciousness enriched and defined by the whole body of doctrine, which has flowed from Him during all the ages. That solemn, gracious Figure rises day by day more clearly before men, whether they love Him or no, as the vital centre of this great whole of doctrines, laws, institutions, which we call Christianity. Round the story of His life the final struggle is to be waged. The foe feels that, so long as that remains, all other victories count for nothing. We feel that if that goes, there is nothing to keep. The principles and the precepts will perish alike, as the fair palace of the old legend, that crumbled to dust when its builder died. But so long as He stands before mankind as He is painted in the Gospel, it will endure. If all else were annihilated, Churches, creeds and all, leave us these four Gospels, and all else would be evolved again. The world knows now, and the Church has always known, though it has not always been true to the significance of the fact, that Jesus Christ is Christianity, and that because He lives, it will live also.

And consequently the sum of all personal religion is this simple act described here as *cleaving to Him*.

Need I do more than refer to the rich variety of symbols and forms of expression under which that thought is put alike by the Master and by His servants? Deepest of all are His own great words, of which our text is but a feeble echo, 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' Fairest of all is that lovely emblem of the vine, setting forth the sweet mystery of our union with Him. Far as it is from the outmost pliant tendril to the root, one life passes to the very extremities, and every cluster swells and reddens and mellows because of its mysterious flow. 'So also is Christ.' We remember how often the invitation flowed from His lips, *Come* unto Me; how He was wont to beckon men away from self and the world with the great command, *Follow* Me; how He explained the secret of all true life to consist in *eating* Him. We may recall, too, the emphasis and perpetual reiteration with which Paul speaks of being 'in Jesus' as the condition of all blessedness, power, and righteousness; and the emblems which he so often employs of the building bound into a whole on the foundation from which it derives its stability, of the body compacted and organised into a whole by the head from which it derives its life.

We begin to be Christians, as this context tells us, when we 'turn to the Lord.' We continue to be Christians, as Barnabas reminded these ignorant beginners, by 'cleaving to the Lord.' Seeing, then, that our great task is to preserve that which we have as the very foundation of our Christian life, clearly the truest method of so keeping it will be the constant repetition of the act by which we got it at first. In other words, faith joined us to Christ, and continuously reiterated acts of faith keep us united to Him. So, if I may venture, fathers and brethren, to cast my words

into the form of exhortation, even to such an audience as the present, I would earnestly say, Let us cleave to Christ by continual renewal of our first faith in Him.

The longest line may be conceived of as produced simply by the motion of its initial point. So should our lives be, our progress not consisting in leaving our early acts of faith behind us, but in repeating them over and over again till the points coalesce in one unbroken line which goes straight to the Throne and Heart of Jesus. True, the repetition should be accompanied with fuller knowledge, with calmer certitude, and should come from a heart ennobled and encircled by a Christ-possessing past. As in some great symphony the theme which was given out in low notes on one poor instrument recurs over and over again, embroidered with varying harmonies, and unfolding a richer music, till it swells into all the grandeur of the triumphant close, so our lives should be bound into a unity, and in their unity bound to Christ by the constant renewal of our early faith, and the fathers should come round again to the place which they occupied when as children they first knew Him that is 'from the beginning' to the end one and the same.

Such constant reiteration is needed, too, because yesterday's trust has no more power to secure to-day's union than the shreds of cloth and nails which hold last year's growth to the wall will fasten this year's shoots. Each moment must be united to Christ by its own act of faith, or it will be separated from Him. So living in the Lord we shall be strong and wise, happy and holy. So dying in the Lord we shall be of the dead who are blessed. So sleeping in Jesus we shall at the last be found in Him at that day, and shall be

raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

But more specially let us cleave to Christ by habitual contemplation. There can be no real continuous closeness of intercourse with Him, except by thought ever recurring to Him amidst all the tumult of our busy days. I do not mean professional thinking or controversial thinking, of which we ministers have more than enough. There is another mood of mind in which to approach our Lord than these, a mood sadly unfamiliar, I am afraid, in these days: when poor Mary has hardly a chance of a reputation for 'usefulness' by the side of busy, bustling Martha—that still contemplation of the truth which we possess, not with the view of discovering its foundations, or investigating its applications, or even of increasing our knowledge of its contents, but of bringing our own souls more completely under its influence, and saturating our being with its fragrance. The Church has forgotten how to meditate. We are all so occupied arguing and deducing and elaborating, that we have no time for retired, still contemplation, and therefore lose the finest aroma of the truth we profess to believe. Many of us are so busy thinking about Christianity that we have lost our hold of Christ. Sure I am that there are few things more needed by our modern religion than the old exhortation, 'Come, My people, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.' Cleave to the Lord by habitual play of meditative thought on the treasures hidden in His name, and waiting like gold in the quartz, to be the prize of our patient sifting and close gaze.

And when the great truths embodied in Him stand clear before us, then let us remember that we have not

done with them when we have *seen* them. Next must come into exercise the moral side of faith, the voluntary act of trust, the casting ourselves on Him whom we behold, the making our own of the blessings which He holds out to us. Flee to Christ as to our strong habitation to which we may continually resort. Hold tightly by Christ with a grasp which nothing can slacken (that whitens your very knuckles as you clench Him), lean on Christ all your weight and all your burdens. Cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart.

Let us cleave to the Lord by constant outgoings of our love to Him. That is the bond which unites human spirits together in the only real union, and Scripture teaches us to see in the sweetest, sacredest, closest tie that men and women can know, a real, though faint, shadow of the far deeper and truer union between Christ and us. The same love which is the bond of perfectness between man and man, is the bond between us and Christ. In no dreamy, semi-pantheistic fusion of the believer with his Lord do we find the true conception of the unity of Christ and His Church, but in a union which preserves the individualities lest it should slay the love. Faith knits us to Christ, and faith is the mother of love, which maintains the blessed union. So let us not be ashamed of the *emotional* side of our religion, nor deem that we can cleave to Christ unless our hearts twine their tendrils round Him, and our love pours its odorous treasures on His sacred feet, not without weeping and embraces. Cold natures may carp, but Love is justified of her children, and Christ accepts the homage that has a heart in it. Cleaving to the Lord is not merely love, but it is impossible without it. The order is Faith, Love, Obedience—that threefold cord knits men to

Christ, and Christ to men. For the understanding, a continuous grasp of Him as the object of thought. For the heart, a continuous outgoing to Him as the object of our love. For the will, a continuous submission to Him as the Lord of our obedience. For the whole nature, a continuous cleaving to Him as the object of our faith and worship.

Such is the true discipline of the Christian life. Such is the all-sufficient command; as for the newest convert from heathenism, with little knowledge and the taint of his old vices in his soul, so for the saint fullest of wisdom and nearest the Light.

It is all-sufficient. If Barnabas had been like some of us, he would have had a very different style of exhortation. He would have said, 'This irregular work has been well done, but there are no authorised teachers here, and no provision has been made for the due administration of the sacraments of the Church. The very first thing of all is to give these people the blessing of bishops and priests.' Some of us would have said, 'Valuable work has been done, but these good people are terribly ignorant. The best thing would be to get ready as soon as possible some manual of Christian doctrine, and in the meantime provide for their systematic instruction in at least the elements of the faith.' Some of us would have said, 'No doubt they have been converted, but we fear there has been too much of the emotional in the preaching. The moral side of Christianity has not been pressed home, and what they chiefly need is to be taught that it is not feeling, but righteousness. Plain, practical instruction in Christian duty is the one thing they want.'

Barnabas knew better. He did not despise organisation, nor orthodoxy, nor practical righteousness, but

he knew that all three, and everything else that any man needed for his perfecting would come, if only the converts kept near to Christ, and that nothing else was of any use if they did not. That same conviction should for us settle the relative importance which we attach to these subordinate and derivative things, and to the primary and primitive duty. Obedience to it will secure them. They, without it, are not worth securing.

We spend much pains and effort nowadays in perfecting our organisations and consolidating our resources, and I have not a word to say against that. But heavier machinery needs more power in the engine, and that means greater capacity in your boilers and more fire in your furnace. The more complete our organisation, the more do we need a firm hold of Christ, or we shall be overweighted by it, shall be in danger of burning incense to our own net, shall be tempted to trust in drill rather than in courage, in mechanism rather than in the life drawn from Christ. On the other hand, if we put as our first care the preservation of the closeness of our union with Christ, that life will shape a body for itself, and 'to every seed its own body.'

True conceptions of Him, and a definite theology, are good and needful. Let us cleave to Him with mind and heart, and we shall receive all the knowledge we need, and be guided into the deep things of God. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and the basis of all theology is the personal possession of Him who is 'the wisdom of God' and 'the Light of the world.' Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. *Pectus facit Theologum.*

Plain, straightforward morality and everyday righteousness are better than all emotion and all dogmatism

and all churchism, says the world, and Christianity says much the same; but plain, straightforward righteousness and everyday morality come most surely when a man is keeping close to Christ. In a word, everything that can adorn the character with beauty, and clothe the Church with glorious apparel, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, all that the world or God calls virtue and crowns with praise, they are all in their fulness in Him, and all are most surely derived from Him by keeping fast hold of His hand, and preserving the channels clear through which His manifold grace may flow into our souls. The same life is strength in the arm, pliancy in the fingers, swiftness in the foot, light in the eye, music on the lips; so the same grace is Protean in its forms, and to His servants who trust Him Christ ever says, 'What would ye that I should do unto you? Be it even as thou wilt.' The same mysterious power lives in the swaying branch, and in the veined leaf, and in the blushing clusters. With like wondrous transformations of the one grace, the Lord pours Himself into our spirits, filling all needs and fitting for all circumstances. Therefore for us all, individuals and Churches, this remains the prime command, 'With purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord.' Dear brethren in the ministry, how sorely we need this exhortation! Our very professional occupation with Christ and His truth is full of danger for us; we are so accustomed to handle these sacred themes as a means of instructing or impressing others that we get to regard them as our weapons, even if we do not degrade them still further by thinking of them as our stock-in-trade and means of oratorical effect. We must keep very firm hold of Christ for ourselves by much solitary com-

munion, and so retranslating into the nutriment of our own souls the message we bring to men, else when we have preached to others we ourselves may be cast away. All the ordinary tendencies which draw men from Him work on us, and a host of others peculiar to ourselves, and all around us run strong currents of thought which threaten to sweep many away. Let us tighten our grasp of Him in the face of modern doubt; and take heed to ourselves that neither vanity, nor worldliness, nor sloth; neither the gravitation earthward common to all, nor the temptations proper to *our* office; neither unbelieving voices without nor voices within, seduce us from His side. There only is our peace, there our wisdom, there our power.

Subtly and silently the separating forces are ever at work upon us, and all unconsciously to ourselves our hold may relax, and the flow of this grace into our spirits may cease, while yet we mechanically keep up the round of outward service, nor even suspect that our strength is departed from us. Many a stately elm that seems full of vigorous life, for all its spreading boughs and clouds of dancing leaves, is hollow at the heart, and when the storm comes goes down with a crash, and men wonder, as they look at the ruin, how such a mere shell of life with a core of corruption could stand so long. It rotted within, and fell at last, because its roots did not go deep down to the rich soil, where they would have found nourishment, but ran along near the surface among gravel and stones. If we would stand firm, be sound within, and bring forth much fruit, we must strike our roots deep in Him who is the anchorage of our souls, and the nourisher of all our being.

Hearken, beloved brethren, in this great work of the

ministry, not to the exhortation of the servant, but to the solemn command of the Master, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' And let us, knowing our own weakness, take heed of the self-confidence that answers, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,' and turn the vows which spring to our lips into the lowly prayer, 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken Thou me according to Thy word.' Then, thinking rather of His cleaving to us than of our cleaving to Him, let us resolutely take as the motto of our lives the grand words: 'I follow after, if that I may lay hold of that for which I am also laid hold of by Christ Jesus!'

WHAT A GOOD MAN IS, AND HOW HE BECOMES SO

'He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'—ACTS xi. 24.

'A GOOD man.' How easily that title is often gained! There is, perhaps, no clearer proof that men are bad than the sort of people whom they consent to call good.

It is a common observation that all words describing moral excellence tend to deteriorate and to contract their meaning, just as bright metal rusts by exposure, or coins become light and illegible by use. So it comes to pass that any decently respectable man, especially if he has an easy temper and a dash of frankness and good humour, is christened with this title 'good.' The Bible, which is the verdict of the Judge, is a great deal more chary in its use of the word. You remember how Jesus Christ once rebuked a man for addressing

Him so, not that He repudiated the title, but that the giver had bestowed it lightly and out of mere conventional politeness. The word is too noble to be applied without very good reason.

But here we have a picture of Barnabas hung in the gallery of Scripture portraits, and this is the description of it in the catalogue, 'He was a good man.'

You observe that my text is in the nature of an analysis. It begins at the outside, and works inwards. 'He was a good man.' Indeed;—how came he to be so? He was 'full of the Holy Ghost.' Full of the Holy Ghost, was he? How came he to be that? He was 'full of faith.' So the writer digs down, as it were, till he gets to the bed-rock, on which all the higher strata repose; and here is his account of the way in which it is possible for human nature to win this resplendent title, and to be adjudged of God as 'good,' 'full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

So these three steps in the exposition of the character and its secret will afford a framework for what I have to say now.

I. Note, then, first, the sort of man whom the Judge will call 'good.'

Now, I suppose I need not spend much time in massing together, in brief outline, the characteristics of Barnabas. He was a Levite, belonging to the sacerdotal tribe, and perhaps having some slight connection with the functions of the Temple ministry. He was not a resident in the Holy Land, but a Hellenistic Jew, a native of Cyprus, who had come into contact with heathenism in a way that had beaten many a prejudice out of him. We first hear of him as taking a share in the self-sacrificing burst of brotherly love, which, whether it was wise or not, was noble. 'He,

having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.' And, as would appear from a reference in one of Paul's letters, he had to support himself afterwards by manual labour.

Then the next thing that we hear of him is that, when the young man who had been a persecuting Pharisee, and the rising hope of the anti-Christian party, all at once came forward with some story of a vision which he had seen on the road to Damascus, and when the older Christians were suspicious of a trick to worm himself into their secrets by a pretended conversion, Barnabas, with the generosity of an unsuspicious nature, which often sees deeper into men than do suspicious eyes, was the first to cast the ægis of his recognition round him. In like manner, when Christianity took an entirely spontaneous and, to the Church at Jerusalem, rather unwelcome new development and expansion, when some unofficial believers, without any authority from headquarters, took upon themselves to stride clean across the wall of separation, and to speak of Jesus Christ to blank heathens, and found, to the not altogether gratified surprise of the Christians at Jerusalem, 'that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost,' it was Barnabas who was sent down to look into this surprising new phenomenon, and we read that 'when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad.' The reason why he rejoiced over the manifestation of the grace of God in such a strange form was because 'he was a good man,' and his goodness recognised goodness in others and was glad at the work of the Lord. The new condition of affairs sent him to look for Paul, and to put him to work. Then we find him set apart to missionary service, and the

leader of the first missionary band, in which he was accompanied by his friend Saul. He acquiesced frankly, and without a murmur, in the superiority of the junior, and yielded up pre-eminence to him quite willingly. The story of that missionary journey begins 'Barnabas and Saul,' but very soon it comes to be 'Paul and Barnabas,' and it keeps that order throughout. He was an older man than Paul, for when at Lystra the people thought that the gods had come down in the likeness of men; Barnabas was Jupiter, and Paul the quick-footed Mercury, messenger of the gods. He was in the work before Paul was thought of, and it must have taken a great deal of goodness to acquiesce in 'He must increase and I must decrease.' Then came the quarrel between them, the foolish fondness for his runaway nephew John Mark, whom he insisted on retaining in a place for which he was conspicuously unfitted. And so he lost his friend, the confidence of the Church, and his work. He sulked away into Cyprus; he had his nephew, for whom he had given up all these other things. A little fault may wreck a life, and the whiter the character the blacker the smallest stain upon it.

We do not hear anything more of him. Apparently, from one casual allusion, he continued to serve the Lord in evangelistic work, but the sweet communion of the earlier days, and the confident friendship with the Apostle, seem to have come to an end with that sharp contention. So Barnabas drops out of the rank of Christian workers. And yet 'he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

Now I have spent more time than I meant over this brief outline of the sort of character here pointed at. Let me just gather into one or two sentences what

seem to me to be the lessons of it. The first is this, that the tap-root of all goodness is reference to God and obedience to Him. People tell us that morality is independent of religion. I admit that many men are better than their creeds, and many men are worse than their creeds; but I would also venture to assert that morality is the garment of religion; the body of which religion is the soul; the expression of religion in daily life. And although I am not going to say that nothing which a man does without reference to God has any comparative goodness in it, or that all the acts which are thus void of reference to Him stand upon one level of evil, I do venture to say that the noblest deed, which is not done in conscious obedience to the will of God, lacks its supreme nobleness. The loftiest perfection of conduct is obedience to God. And whatever excellence of self-sacrifice, 'whatsoever things lovely and of good report,' there may be, apart from the presence of this perfect motive, those deeds are imperfect. They do not correspond either to the whole obligations or to the whole possibilities of man, and, therefore, they are beneath the level of the highest good. Good is measured by reference to God.

Then, further, let me remark that one broad feature which characterises the truest goodness is the suppression of self. That is only another way of saying the same thing as I have been saying. It is illustrated for us all through this story of Barnabas. Whosoever can say, 'I think not of myself, but of others; of the cause; of the help I can give to men; and I lay not goods only, nor prejudices only, nor the pride of position and the supremacy of place only at the feet of God, but I lay down my whole self; and I desire

that self may be crucified, that God may live in me,'—he, and only he, has reached the height of goodness. Goodness requires the suppression of self.

Further, note that the gentler traits of character are pre-eminent in Christian goodness. There is nothing about this man heroic or exceptional. His virtues are all of the meek and gracious sort—those which we relegate sometimes to an inferior place in our estimates. These things make but a poor show by the side of some of the tawdry splendours of what the vulgar world calls virtues. It requires an educated eye to see the harmony of the sober colouring of some great painter. A child, a clown, a vulgar person—and there are such in all ranks—will prefer flaring reds and blues and yellows heaped together in staring contrast. A thrush or a blackbird is but a soberly clad creature by the side of macaws and paroquets; but the one has a song and the others have only a screech. The gentle virtues are the truly Christian virtues—patience and meekness and long-suffering and sympathy and readiness to efface oneself for the sake of God and of men.

So there is a bit of comfort for us commonplace, humdrum people, to whom God has only given one or two talents, and who can never expect to make a figure before men. We may be little violets below a stone, if we cannot be flaunting hollyhocks and tiger lilies. We may have the beauty of goodness in us after Christ's example, and that is better than to be great.

Barnabas was no genius. He was not even a genius in goodness; he did not strike out anything original and out of the way. He seems to have been a commonplace kind of man enough; but 'he was a good man.'

And the weakest and the humblest of us may hope to have the same thing said of us, if we will.

And then, note further, that true goodness, thank God! does not exclude the possibility of falling and sinning. There is a black spot in this man's history; and there are black spots in the histories of all saints. Thank God! the Bible is, as some people would say, almost brutally frank in telling us about the imperfections of the best. Very often imperfections are the exaggerations of characteristic goodnesses, and warn us to take care that we do not push, as Barnabas did, our facility to the point of criminal complicity with weaknesses; and that we do not indulge, instead of strenuously rebuking when need is. Never let our gentleness fall away, like a badly made jelly, into a trembling heap, and never let our strength gather itself together into a repulsive attitude, but guard against the exaggeration of virtue into vice.

Remember that whilst there may be good men who sin, there is One entire and flawless, in whom all types of excellence do meet, and who alone of humanity can front the verdict of the world, and has fronted it now for nineteen centuries, with the question upon His lips, which none have dared to answer, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?'

II. Secondly, notice the divine Helper who makes men good.

Luke, if he be the writer of the Acts, goes on with his analysis. He has done with the first fold, the outer garment, as it were; he strips it off and shows us the next fold, 'full of the Holy Ghost.'

A divine Helper, not merely a divine influence, but a divine Person, who not only helps men from without, but so enters into a man as that the man's whole

nature is saturated with Him—that is strange language. Mystical and unreal I dare say some of you may think it, but let us consider whether some such divine Helper is not plainly pointed as necessary, by the experience of every man that ever honestly tried to make himself good.

I have no doubt that I am speaking to many persons who, more or less constantly and courageously and earnestly, have laboured at the task of self-improvement and self-culture. I venture to think that, if their standard of what they wish to attain is high, their confession of what they have attained will be very low. Ah, brother! if we think of what it is that we need to make us good—viz. the strengthening of these weak wills of ours, which we cannot strengthen but to a very limited degree by any tonics that we can apply, or any supports with which we may bind them round; if we consider the resistance which ourselves, our passions, our tastes, our habits, our occupations offer, and the resistance which the world around us, friends, companions, and all the aggregate, dread and formidable, of material things present to our becoming, in any lofty and comprehensive sense of the term, good men and women, I think we shall be ready to listen, as to a true Gospel, to the message that says, ‘You do not need to do it by yourself.’ You have got the wolf by the ears, perhaps, for a moment, but there is tremendous strength in the brute, and your hands and wrists will ache in holding him presently, and what will happen then? You do not need to try it yourself. There is a divine Helper standing at your sides and waiting to strengthen you, and that Helper does not work from outside; He will pass within, and dwell in your hearts and mould and strengthen your

wills to what is good, and suppress your inclinations to evil, and, by His inward presence, teach 'your hands to war and your fingers to fight.'

Surely, surely, the experience of the world from the beginning, confirmed by the consciousness and conscience of every one of us, tells us that of ourselves we are impotent, and that the good that is within the reach of our unaided efforts is poor and fragmentary and superficial indeed.

The great promise of the Gospel is precisely this promise. We terribly limit and misunderstand what we call the Gospel if we give such exclusive predominance to one part of it, as some of us are accustomed to do. Thank God! the first word that Jesus Christ says to any soul is, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' But that first word has a second that follows it, 'Arise! and walk!' and it is for the sake of the second that the first is spoken. The gift of pardon, the consciousness of acceptance, the fact of reconciliation with God, the closing of the doors of the place of retribution, the quieting of the stings of accusing conscience, all these are but meant to be introductory to that which Jesus Christ Himself, in the Gospel of John, emphatically calls more than once '*the* gift of God,' which He symbolised by 'living water,' which whosoever drank should never thirst, and which whosoever possessed would give it forth in living streams of holy life and noble deeds. The promise of the Gospel is the promise of new life, derived from Christ and maintained in us by the indwelling Spirit, which will come like fresh reinforcements to an all but beaten army in some hard-fought field, which will stand like a stay behind a man, to us almost blown over by the gusts of temptation, which will strengthen what is weak, raise what is low,

illumine what is dark, and will make us who are evil good with a goodness given by God through His Son.

Surely there is nothing more congruous with that divine character than that He who Himself is good, and good from Himself, should rejoice in making us, His poor children, into His own likeness. Surely He would not be good unless He delighted to make us good. Surely it is something very like presumption in men to assert that the direct communication of the Spirit of God with the spirits whom God has made is an impossibility. Surely it is flying in the face of Scripture teaching to deny that such communication is a promise. Surely it is a flagrant contradiction of the depths of Christian experience to falter in the belief that it is a very solid reality.

‘Full of the Holy Ghost,’ as a vessel might be to its brim of golden wine; Christian men and women! does that describe you? Full? A dribbling drop or two in the bottom of the jar. Whose fault is it? Why, with that rushing mighty wind to fill our sails if we like, should we be lying in the sickly calms of the tropics, with the pitch oozing out of the seams, and the idle canvas flapping against the mast? Why, with those tongues of fire hovering over our heads, should we be cowering over grey ashes in which there lives a little spark? Why, with that great rushing tide of the river of the water of life, should we be like the dry watercourses of the desert, with bleached and white stones baking where the stream should be running? ‘O! Thou that art named the House of Israel, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?’

III. And so, lastly, we are shown how that divine Helper comes to men.

‘Full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.’ There is no

goodness without the impulse and indwelling of the divine Spirit, and there is no divine Spirit to dwell in a man's heart without that man's trusting in Jesus Christ. The condition of receiving the gift that makes us good is simply and solely that we should put our trust in Jesus Christ the Giver. That opens the door, and the divine Spirit enters.

True! there are convincing operations which He effects upon the world; but these are not in question here. These come prior to, and independent of, faith. But the work of the Spirit of God, present within us to heal and hallow us, has as condition our trust in Jesus Christ, the Great Healer. If you open a chink, the water will come in. If you trust in Jesus Christ, He will give you the new life of His Spirit, which will make you free from the law of sin and death. That divine Spirit 'which they that believe in Him should receive' delights to enter into every heart where His presence is desired. Faith is desire; and desires rooted in faith cannot be in vain. Faith is expectation; and expectations based upon the divine promise can never be disappointed. Faith is dependence, and dependence that reckons upon God, and upon God's gift of His Spirit, will surely be recompensed.

The measure in which we possess the power that makes us good depends altogether upon ourselves. 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.' You may have as much of God as you want, and as little as you will. The measure of your faith will determine at once the measure of your goodness, and of your possession of the Spirit that makes good. Just as when the prophet miraculously increased the oil in the cruse, the golden stream flowed as long as they brought vessels, and stayed when there were no more,

so as long as we open our hearts for the reception, the gift will not be withheld, but God will not let it run like water spilled upon the ground that cannot be gathered up. If we will desire, if we will expect, if we will reckon on, if we will look to, Jesus Christ, and, beside all this, if we will honestly use the power that we possess, our capacity will grow, and the gift will grow, and our holiness and purity will grow with it.

Some of you have been trying more or less continuously, all your lives, to mend your own characters and improve yourselves. Brethren, there is a better way than that. A modern poet says—

‘Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lift life to sovereign power.’

Taken by itself that is pure heathenism. Self cannot improve self. Put self into God’s keeping, and say, ‘I cannot guard, keep, purge, hallow mine own self. Lord, do Thou do it for me!’ It is no use to try to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven. A ladder has been let down on which we may pass upwards, and by which God’s angels of grace and beauty will come down to dwell in our hearts. If the Judge is to say of each of us, ‘He was a good man,’ He must also be able to say, ‘He was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.’

A NICKNAME ACCEPTED

‘The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.’—ACTS XI. 26.

NATIONS and parties, both political and religious, very often call themselves by one name, and are known to the outside world by another. These outside names are generally given in contempt; and yet they some-

times manage to hit the very centre of the characteristics of the people on whom they are bestowed, and so by degrees get to be adopted by them, and worn as an honour.

So it has been with the name 'Christian.' It was given at the first by the inhabitants of the Syrian city of Antioch, to a new sort of people that had sprung up amongst them, and whom they could not quite make out. They would not fit into any of their categories, and so they had to invent a new name for them. It is never used in the New Testament by Christians about themselves. It occurs here in this text; it occurs in Agrippa's half-contemptuous exclamation: 'You seem to think it is a very small matter to make me—me, a king!—a Christian, one of those despised people!' And it occurs once more, where the Apostle Peter is specifying the charges brought against them: 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf' (1 Peter iv. 16). That sounds like the beginning of the process which has gone on ever since, by which the nickname, flung by the sarcastic men of Antioch, has been turned into the designation by which, all over the world, the followers of Jesus Christ have been proud to call themselves.

Now in this text there are the outside name by which the world calls the followers of Jesus Christ, and one of the many interior names by which the Church called itself. I have thought it might be profitable now to put all the New Testament names for Christ's followers together, and think about them.

I. So, to begin with, we deal with this name given by the world to the Church, which the Church has adopted.

Observe the circumstances under which it was given.

A handful of large-hearted, brave men, anonymous fugitives belonging to the little Church in Jerusalem, had come down to Antioch; and there, without premeditation, without authority, almost without consciousness—certainly without knowing what a great thing they were doing—they took, all at once, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, a great step by preaching the Gospel to pure heathen Greeks; and so began the process by which a small Jewish sect was transformed into a world-wide church. The success of their work in Antioch, amongst the pure heathen population, has for its crowning attestation this, that it compelled the curiosity-hunting, pleasure-loving, sarcastic Antiocheans to find out a new name for this new thing; to write out a new label for the new bottles into which the new wine was being put. Clearly the name shows that the Church was beginning to attract the attention of outsiders.

Clearly it shows, too, that there was a novel element in the Church. The earlier disciples had been all Jews, and could be lumped together along with their countrymen, and come under the same category. But here was something that could not be called either Jew or Greek, because it embraced both. The new name is the first witness to the cosmopolitan character of the primitive Church. Then clearly, too, the name indicates that in a certain dim, confused way, even these superficial observers had got hold of the right notion of what it was that *did* bind these people together. They called them 'Christians'—Christ's men, Christ's followers. But it was only a very dim refraction of the truth that had got to them; they had no notion that 'Christ' was not a proper name, but the designation of an office; and they had no notion that there was anything

peculiar or strange in the bond which united its adherents to Christ. Hence they called His followers 'Christians,' just as they would have called Herod's followers 'Herodians,' in the political world, or Aristotle's followers 'Aristotelians' in the philosophical world. Still, in their groping way, they had put their finger on the fact that the one power that held this heterogeneous mass together, the one bond that bound up 'Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free' into one vital unity, was a personal relation to a living Person. And so they said—not understanding the whole significance of it, but having got hold of the right end of the clue—they said, 'They are Christians!' 'Christ's people,' 'the followers of this Christ.'

And their very blunder was a felicity. If they had called them 'Jesuits' that would have meant the followers of the mere man. They did not know how much deeper they had gone when they said, not followers of Jesus, but 'followers of Christ'; for it is not Jesus the Man, but Jesus Christ, the Man with His office, that makes the centre and the bond of the Christian Church.

These, then, are the facts, and the fair inferences from them. A plain lesson here lies on the surface. The Church—that is to say, the men and women who make its members—should draw to itself the notice of the outside world. I do not mean by advertising, and ostentation, and sounding trumpets, and singularities, and affectations. None of all these are needed. If you are live Christians it will be plain enough to outsiders. It is a poor comment on your consistency, if, being Christ's followers, you can go through life unrecognised even by 'them that are without.' What shall we say of leaven which does *not* leaven, or of

light which does *not* shine, or of salt which does *not* repel corruption? It is a poor affair if, being professed followers of Jesus Christ, you do not impress the world with the thought that 'here is a man who does not come under any of our categories, and who needs a new entry to describe *him*.' The world ought to have the same impression about you which Haman had about the Jews—'Their laws are diverse from all people.'

Christian professors, are the world's names for each other enough to describe you by, or do you need another name to be coined for you in order to express the manifest characteristics that you display? The Church that does not *provoke* the attention—I use the word in its etymological, not its offensive sense—the Church that does not call upon itself the attention and interest of outsiders, is not a Church as Jesus Christ meant it to be, and it is not a Church that is worth keeping alive; and the sooner it has decent burial the better for itself and for the world!

There is another thing here, viz.: this name suggests that the clear impression made by our conduct and character, as well as by our words, should be that we belong to Jesus Christ. The eye of an outside observer may be unable to penetrate the secret of the deep sweet tie uniting us to Jesus, but there should be no possibility of the most superficial and hasty glance overlooking the fact that we *are* His. He should manifestly be the centre and the guide, the impulse and the pattern, the strength and the reward, of our whole lives. We are Christians. That should be plain for all folks to see, whether we speak or be silent. Brethren, is it so with you? Does your life need no commentary of your words in order that men should know what is the hidden spring that moves all its

wheels; what is the inward spirit that co-ordinates all its motions into harmony and beauty? Is it true that like 'the ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself,' your allegiance to Jesus Christ, and the overmastering and supreme authority which He exercises upon you, and upon your life, 'cannot be hid'? Do you think that, without your words, if you, living in the way you do, were put down into the middle of Pekin, as these handful of people were put down into the middle of the heathen city of Antioch, the wits of the Chinese metropolis would have to invent a name for you, as the clever men of Antioch did for these people; and do you think that if they had to invent a name, the name that would naturally come to their lips, looking at you, would be 'Christians,' 'Christ's men'? If it would not, there is something wrong.

The last word that I say about this first part of my text is this. It is a very sad thing, but it is one that is always occurring, that the world's inadequate notions of what makes a follower of Jesus Christ get accepted by the Church. Why was it that the name 'Christian' ran all over Christendom in the course of a century and a half? I believe very largely because it was a conveniently vague name; because it did not describe the deepest and sacredest of the bonds that unite us to Jesus Christ. Many a man is quite willing to say, 'I am a Christian,' who would hesitate a long time before he said, 'I am a believer,' 'I am a disciple.' The vagueness of the name, the fact that it erred by defect in not touching the central, deepest relation between man and Jesus Christ, made it very appropriate to the declining spirituality and increasing formalism of the Christian Church in the post-Apostolic age. It is a sad thing when the Church drops its standard down to the

world's notion of what it ought to be, and adopts the world's name for itself and its converts.

II. I turn now to set side by side with this vague, general, outside name the more specific and *interior* names—if I may so call them—by which Christ's followers at first knew themselves.

The world said, 'You are Christ's men'; and the names which were self-imposed and are now to be considered might be taken as being the Church's explanation of what the world was fumbling at when it so called them. There are four of them: of course, I can only just touch on them.

(a) The first is in this verse—'*disciples*.' The others are *believers*, *saints*, *brethren*. These four are the Church's own christening of itself; its explanation and expansion, its deepening and heightening, of the vague name given by the world.

As to the first, *disciples*, any concordance will show that the name was employed almost exclusively during the time of Christ's life upon earth. It is the only name for Christ's followers in the Gospels; it occurs also, mingled with others, in the Acts of the Apostles, and it never occurs thereafter.

The name 'disciple,' then, carries us back to the historical beginning of the whole matter, when Jesus was looked upon as a Rabbi having followers called disciples; just as were John the Baptist and his followers, Gamaliel and his school, or Socrates and his. It sets forth Christ as being the Teacher, and His followers as being His adherents, His scholars, who learned at His feet.

Now that is always true. *We* are Christ's scholars quite as much as were the men who heard and saw with their eyes and handled with their hands, of the Word

of Life. Not by words only, but by gracious deeds and fair, spotless life, He taught them and us and all men to the end of time, our highest knowledge of God of whom He is the final revelation, our best knowledge of what men should and shall be by His perfect life in which is contained all morality, our only knowledge of that future in that He has died and is risen and lives to help and still to teach. He teaches us still by the record of His life, and by the living influence of that Spirit whom He sends forth to guide us into all truth. He is the Teacher, the only Teacher, the Teacher for all men, the Teacher of all truth, the Teacher for evermore. He speaks from Heaven. Let us give heed to His voice.

But that Name is not enough to tell all that He is to us, or we to Him, and so after He had passed from earth it unconsciously and gradually dropped out of use by the disciples, as they felt a deepened bond uniting them to Him who was not only their Teacher of the Truth which was Himself, but was their Sacrifice and Advocate with the Father. And for all who hold the, as I believe, essentially imperfect conception of Jesus Christ as being mainly a Teacher, either by word or by pattern; whether it be put into the old form or into the modern form of regarding Him as the Ideal and Perfect Man, it seems to me a fact well worthy of consideration, that the name of disciple and the relation expressed by it were speedily felt by the Christian Church to be inadequate as a representation of the bond that knit them to Him. He is our Teacher, we His scholars. He is more than that, and a more sacred bond unites us to Him. As our Master we owe Him absolute submission. When He speaks, we have to accept His dictum. What He

says is truth, pure and entire. His utterance is the last word upon any subject that He touches, it is the ultimate appeal, and the Judge that ends the strife. We owe Him submission, an open eye for all new truth, constant docility, as conscious of our own imperfections, and a confident expectation that He will bless us continuously with high and as yet unknown truths that come from His inexhaustible stores of wisdom and knowledge.

(b) Teacher and scholars move in a region which, though it be important, is not the central one. And the word that was needed next to express what the early Church felt Christ was to them, and they to Him, lifts us into a higher atmosphere altogether,—‘*believers*,’ they who are exercising not merely intellectual submission to the dicta of the Teacher, but who are exercising living trust in the person of the Redeemer. The belief which is faith is altogether a higher thing than its first stage, which is the belief of the understanding. There is in it the moral element of trust. We believe a truth, we trust a Person; and the trust which we are to exercise in Jesus Christ, and which knits us to Him, is our trust in Him, not in any character that we may choose to ascribe to Him, but in the character in which He is revealed in the New Testament—Redeemer, Saviour, Manifest God; and therefore, the Infinite Friend and Helper of our souls.

That trust, my brethren, is the one bond that binds men to God, and the one thing that makes us Christ’s men. Apart from it, we may be very near Him, but we are not joined to Him. By it, and by it alone, the union is completed, and His power and His grace flow into our spirits. Are you, not merely a ‘Christian,’ in the world’s notion, being bound in some vague way to

Jesus Christ, but are you a Christian in the sense of trusting your soul's salvation to Him?

(c) Then, still further, there is another name—'*saints*.' It has suffered perhaps more at the hands both of the world and of the Church than any other. It has been taken by the latter and restricted to the dead, and further restricted to those who excel, according to the fantastic, ascetic standard of mediæval Christianity. It has suffered from the world in that it has been used with a certain bitter emphasis of resentment at the claim of superior purity supposed to be implied in it, and so has come to mean on the world's lips one who pretends to be better than other people and whose actions contradict his claim. But the name belongs to all Christ's followers. It makes no claim to special purity, for the central idea of the word 'saint' is not purity. Holiness, which is the English for the Latinised '*sanc-tity*,' holiness which is attributed in the Old Testament to God first, to men only secondarily, does not primarily mean *purity*, but *separation*. God is holy, inasmuch as by that whole majestic character of His, He is lifted above all bounds of creatural limitations, as well as above man's sin. A sacrifice, the Sabbath, a city, a priest's garment, a mitre—all these things are 'holy,' not when they are pure, but when they are devoted to Him. And men are holy, not because they are clean, but because by free self-surrender they have consecrated themselves to Him.

Holiness is consecration, that is to say, holiness is giving myself up to Him to do what He will with. 'I am holy' is not the declaration of my estimate 'I am pure,' but the declaration of the fact 'I am thine, O Lord.' So the New Testament idea of saint has in it these elements—consecration, consecration resting on faith

in Christ, and consecration leading to separation from the world and its sin. And that glad yielding of oneself to God, as wooed by His mercies, and thereby drawn away from communion with our evil surroundings and from submission to our evil selves, must be a part of the experience of every true Christian. All His people are saints, not as being pure, but as being given up to Him, in union with whom alone will the cleansing powers flow into their lives and clothe them with 'the righteousness of saints.' Have you thus consecrated yourself to God?

(d) The last name is '*brethren*'—a name which has been much maltreated both by the insincerity of the Church, and by the sarcasm of the world. It has been an unreal appellation which has meant nothing and been meant to mean nothing, so that the world has said that our '*brethren*' signified a good deal less than their '*brothers*.' 'Tis true, 'tis pity; pity 'tis, 'tis true.'

But what I ask you to notice is that the main thing about that name '*brethren*' is not the relation of the brethren to one another, but their common relation to their Father.

When we call ourselves as Christian people '*brethren*,' we mean first this: that we are the possessors of a supernatural life, which has come from one Father, and which has set us in altogether new relations to one another, and to the world round about us. Do you believe that if you have any of that new life which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, then you are the brethren of all those that possess the same?

As society becomes more complicated, as Christian people grow unlike each other in education, in social position, in occupation, in their general outlook into the world, it is more and more difficult to feel what is

nevertheless true: that any two Christian people, however unlike each other, are nearer each other in the very roots of their nature, than a Christian and a non-Christian, however like each other. It is difficult to feel that, and it is getting more and more difficult, but for all that it is a fact.

And now I wish to ask you, Christian men and women, whether you feel more at home with people who love Jesus Christ—as you say that you love Him—or whether you like better to be with people who do not?

There are some of you who choose your intimate associates, whom you ask to your homes and introduce to your children as desirable companions, with no reference at all to their religious character. The duties of your position, of course, oblige each of you to be much among people who do not share your faith, and it is cowardly and wrong to shrink from the necessity. But for Christian people to make choice of heart friends, or close intimates, among those who have no sympathy with their professed belief about, and love to, Jesus Christ, does not say much for the depth and reality of their religion. A man is known by the company he keeps, and if your friends are picked out for other reasons, and their religion is no part of their attraction, it is not an unfair conclusion that there are other things for which you care more than you do for faith in Jesus Christ and love to Him. If you deeply feel the bond that knits you to Christ, and really live near to Him, you will be near to your brethren. You will feel that 'blood is thicker than water,' and however like you may be to irreligious people in many things, you will feel that the deepest bond of all knits you to the poorest, the most ignorant, the most unlike you in social

position; ay! and the most unlike you in theological opinion, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Now that is the sum of the whole matter. And my last word to you is this: Do not you be contented with the world's vague notions of what makes Christ's man. I do not ask you if you are Christians; plenty of you would say: 'Oh yes! of course! Is not this a Christian country? Was not I christened when I was a child? Are we not all members of the Church of England by virtue of our birth? Yes! of course I am!'

I do not ask you that; *I* do not ask you anything; but I pray you to ask yourselves these four questions: Am I Christ's scholar? Am I believing on Him? Am I consecrated to Him? Am I the possessor of a new life from Him? And never give yourselves rest until you can say humbly and yet confidently, 'Yes! thank God, I am!'

THE MARTYRDOM OF JAMES

'Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword.'—ACTS xii. 2.

ONE might have expected more than a clause to be spared to tell the death of a chief man and the first martyr amongst the Apostles. James, as we know, was one of the group of the Apostles who were in especially close connection with Jesus Christ. He is associated in the Gospels with Peter and his brother John, and is always named before John, as if he were the more important of the two, by reason of age or of other circumstances unknown to us. But yet we know next to nothing about him. In the Acts of the Apostles he is a mere lay figure; his name is only mentioned in the catalogue at the beginning, and here again in the brief notice of his death. The reticent

and merely incidental character of the notice of his martyrdom is sufficiently remarkable. I think the lessons of the fact, and of the, I was going to say, slight way in which the writer of this book refers to it, may perhaps be most pointedly brought out if we take four contrasts—James and Stephen, James and Peter, James and John, James and James. Now, if we take these four I think we shall learn something.

I. First, then, James and Stephen.

Look at the different scale on which the incidents of the deaths of these two are told: the martyrdom of the one is beaten out over chapters, the martyrdom of the other is crammed into a corner of a sentence. And yet, of the two men, the one who is the less noticed filled the larger place officially, and the other was only a simple deacon and preacher of the Word. The fact that Stephen was the first Christian to follow his Lord in martyrdom is not sufficient to account for the extraordinary difference. The difference is to be sought for in another direction altogether. The Bible cares so little about the people whom it names because its true theme is the works of God, and not of man; and the reason why the 'Acts of the Apostles' kills off one of the chief Apostles in this fashion is simply that, as the writer tells us, his theme is 'all that *Jesus*' continued 'to do and to teach after He was taken up.' Since it is Christ who is the true actor, it matters uncommonly little what becomes of James or of the other ten. This book is *not* the 'Acts of the Apostles,' but it is the Acts of Jesus Christ.

I might suggest, too, in like manner, that there is another contrast which I have not included in my four, between the scale on which the death of Jesus Christ is told by Luke, and that on which this death is

narrated. What is the reason why so disproportionate a space of the Gospel is concerned with the last two days of our Lord's life on earth? What is the reason why years are leaped over in silence and moments are spread out in detail, but that the death of a man is only a death, but the death of the Christ is the life of the world? It is little needful that we should have poetical, emotional, picturesque descriptions of martyrdoms and the like in a book which is altogether devoted to tracking the footsteps of Christ in history; and which regards men as nothing more than the successive instruments of His purpose, and the depositories of His grace.

Another lesson which we may draw from the reticence in the case of the Apostle, and the expansiveness in the case of the protomartyr, is that of a wise indifference to the utterly insignificant accident of posthumous memory or oblivion of us and our deeds and sufferings. James sleeps none the less sweetly in his grave, or, rather, wakes none the less triumphantly in heaven, because his life and death are both so scantily narrated. If we 'self-infold the large results' of faithful service, we need not trouble ourselves about its record on earth.

But another lesson which may be learned from this cursory notice of the Apostle's martyrdom is—how small a thing death really is! Looked at from beside the Lord of life and death, which is the point of view of the author of this narrative, 'great death' dwindles to a very little thing. We need to revise our notions if we would understand how trivial it really is. To us it frowns like a black cliff blocking the upper end of our valley, but there is a path round its base, and though the throat of the pass be narrow, it has room

for us to get through and up to the sunny uplands beyond. From a mountain top the country below seems level plain, and what looked like an impassable precipice has dwindled to be indistinguishable. The triviality of death, to those who look upon it from the heights of eternity, is well represented by these brief words which tell of the first breach thereby in the circle of the Apostles.

II. There is another contrast, James and Peter.

Now this chapter tells of two things: the death of one of that pair of friends; the miracle that was wrought for the deliverance of the other from death. Why could not the parts have been exchanged, or why could not the miraculous hand that was stretched out to save the one fisherman of Bethsaida have been put forth to save the other? Why should James be slain, and Peter miraculously delivered? A question easily asked; a question not to be answered by us. We may say that the one was more useful for the development of the Church than the other. But we have all seen lives that, to our poor vision, seemed to be all but indispensable, ruthlessly swept away, and lives that seemed to be, and were, perfectly profitless, prolonged to extreme old age. We may say that maturity of character, development of Christian graces, made the man ready for glory. But we have all seen some struck down when anything but ready; and others left for the blessing of mankind many, many a day after they were far fitter for heaven than thousands that, we hope, have gone there.

So all these little explanations do not go down to the bottom of the matter, and we are obliged just to leave the whole question in the loving Hands that hold

the keys of life and death for us all. Only we may be sure of this, that James was as dear to Christ as Peter was, and that there was no greater love shown in sending the angel that delivered the one out of the 'hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews,' than was shown in sending the angel that stood behind the headsman and directed the stroke of the fatal sword on the neck of the other.

The one was as dear to the Christ as the other—ay, and the one was as surely, and more blessedly, delivered 'from the mouth of the lion' as the other was, though the one seemed to be dragged from his teeth, and the other seemed to be crushed by his powerful jaws. James escaped from Herod when Herod slew him but could not make him unfaithful to his Master, and his deliverance was not less complete than the deliverance of his friend.

But let us remember, also, that if thus, to two equally beloved, there were dealt out these two different fates, it must be because that evil, which, as I said, is not so great as it looks, is also not so bitter as it tastes, and there is no real evil, for the loving heart, in the stroke that breaks its bands and knits it to Jesus Christ. If we are Christians, the deepest desire of our souls is fuller communion with our Lord. We realise that, in some stunted and scanty measure, by life; but oh! is it not strange that we should shrink from that change which will enable us to realise it fully and eternally? The contrast of James and Peter may teach us the equal love that presides over the life of the living and the death of the dying.

III. Another contrast is that of James and John.

The close union, and subsequent separation by this martyrdom, of that pair of brothers is striking and

pathetic. They seem to have together pursued their humble trade of fishermen in the little fishing village of Bethsaida, apparently as working partners with their father Zebedee. They were not divided by discipleship, as was the sad fate of many a brother delivered by a brother to death. If we may attach any weight to the suggestion that the expression in John's narrative, 'He first findeth *his own* brother, Simon,' implies that 'the other disciple' did the same by *his* brother, James was brought to Jesus by John, and new tenderness and strength thereby given to their affection. They were closely associated in their Apostleship, and were together the companions of Jesus in the chief incidents of His life. They were afterwards united in the leadership of the Church. By death they were separated very far: the one the first of all the Apostles to 'become a prey to Satan's rage,' the other 'lingering out his fellows all,' and 'dying in bloodless age,' living to be a hundred years old or more, and looking back through all the long parting to the brother who had joined with him in the wish that even Messiah's Kingdom should not part them, and yet had been parted so soon and parted so long.

Ah! may we not learn the lesson that we should recognise the mercy and wisdom of the ministry of Death the separator, and should tread with patience the lonely road, do calmly the day's work, and tarry till He comes, though those that stood beside us be gone? We may look forward with the assurance that 'God keeps a niche in heaven to hide our idols'; and 'albeit He breaks them to our face,' yet shall we find them again, like Memnon's statue, vocal in the rising sunshine of the heavens.

The brothers, so closely knit, so soon parted, so long separated, were at last reunited. Even to us here, with the chronology of earth still ours, the few years between the early martyrdom of James and the death of the centenarian John seem but a span. The lapse of the centuries that have rolled away since then makes the difference of the dates of the two deaths seem very small, even to us. What a mere nothing it will have looked to them, joined together once more before God!

IV. Lastly, James and James. In his hot youth, when he deserved the name of a son of thunder—so energetic, boisterous, I suppose, destructive perhaps, he was—he and his brother, and their foolish mother, whose name is kindly not told us, go to Christ and say, ‘Grant that we may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom.’ That was what he wished and hoped for, and what he got was years of service, and a taste of persecution, and finally the swish of the headsman’s sword.

And so our dreams get disappointed, and their disappointment is often the road to their fulfilment, for Jesus Christ was answering James’ prayer, ‘Grant that we may sit on Thy right hand in Thy kingdom,’ when He called him to Himself, by the brief and bloody passage of martyrdom. James said, when he did not know what he meant, and the vow was noble though it was ignorant, ‘we can drink of the cup that Thou drinkest.’ And all honour to him! he stuck to his vow; and when the cup was proffered to him he manfully, and like a Christian, took it and drank it to the dregs; and, I suppose, went silently to his grave. But the change between his ardent anticipations and his calm resignation, and between his foolish dream and

the stern reality, may well teach us that, whether our wishes be fulfilled or disappointed, they all need to be purified, and that the disappointment of them on earth is often God's way of fulfilling them for us in higher fashion than we dreamed or asked.

So, brethren, let us leave for ourselves, and for all dear ones, that question of living or dying, to His decision. Only let us be sure that whether our lives be long like John's, or short like James', 'living or dying we are the Lord's.' And then, whatever be the length of life or the manner of death, both will bring us the fulfilment of our highest wishes, and will lead us to His side at whose right hand all those shall sit who have loved Him here, and, though long parted, shall be reunited in common enjoyment of the pleasures for evermore which bloom unfading there. 'And so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON

'Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the Church unto God for him.'—Acts xii. 5 (R.V.)

THE narrative of Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison is full of little vivid touches which can only have come from himself. The whole tone of it reminds us of the Gospel according to St. Mark, which is in like manner stamped with peculiar minuteness and abundance of detail. One remembers that at a late period in the life of the Apostle Paul, Mark and Luke were together with him; and no doubt in those days in Rome, Mark, who had been Peter's special companion and is called by one of the old Christian writers his 'interpreter,' was busy in telling Luke the details

about Peter which appear in the first part of this Book of the Acts.

The whole story seems to me to be full of instruction as well as of picturesque detail; and I desire to bring out the various lessons which appear to me to lie in it.

I. The first of them is this: the strength of the helpless.

Look at that eloquent 'but' in the verse that I have taken as a starting-point: 'Peter therefore was kept in prison, *but* prayer was made earnestly of the Church unto God for him.' There is another similarly eloquent 'but' at the end of the chapter: 'Herod . . . was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost, *but* the Word of God grew and multiplied.' Here you get, on the one hand, all the pompous and elaborate preparations—'four quaternions of soldiers'—four times four is sixteen—sixteen soldiers, two chains, three gates with guards at each of them, Herod's grim determination, the people's malicious expectation of having an execution as a pleasant sensation with which to wind up the Passover Feast. And what had the handful of Christian people? Well, they had prayer; and they had Jesus Christ. That was all, and that is more than enough. How ridiculous all the preparation looks when you let the light of that great 'but' in upon it! Prayer, earnest prayer, 'was made of the Church unto God for him.' And evidently, from the place in which that fact is stated, it is intended that we should say to ourselves that it was *because* prayer was made for him that what came to pass did come to pass. It is not jerked out as an unconnected incident; it is set in a logical sequence. 'Prayer was made earnestly of the Church

unto God for him'—and so when Herod would have brought him forth, behold, the angel of the Lord came, and the light shined into the prison. It is the same sequence of thought that occurs in that grand theophany in the eighteenth Psalm, 'My cry entered into His ears; then the earth shook and trembled'; and there came all the magnificence of the thunderstorm and the earthquake and the divine manifestation; and this was the purpose of it all—'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.' The whole energy of the divine nature is set in motion, and comes swooping down from highest heaven to the trembling earth. And of that fact the one end is one poor man's cry, and the other end is his deliverance. The moving spring of the divine manifestation was an individual's prayer; the aim of it was the individual's deliverance. A little water is put into a hydraulic ram at the right place, and the outcome is the lifting of tons. So the helpless men who could only pray are stronger than Herod and his quaternions and his chains and his gates. 'Prayer was made,' therefore all that happened was brought to pass, and Peter was delivered.

Peter's companion, James, was killed off, as we read in a verse or two before. Did not the Church pray for him? Surely they did. Why was their prayer not answered, then? God has not any step-children. James was as dear to God as Peter was. One prayer was answered; was the other left unanswered? It was the divine purpose that Peter, being prayed for, should be delivered; and we may reverently say that, if there had not been the many in Mary's house praying, there would have been no angel in Peter's cell.

So here are revealed the strength of the weak, the armour of the unarmed, the defence of the defenceless. If the Christian Church in its times of persecution and affliction had kept itself to the one weapon that is allowed it, it would have been more conspicuously victorious. And if we, in our individual lives—where, indeed, we have to do something else besides pray—would remember the lesson of that eloquent ‘but,’ we should be less frequently brought to perplexity and reduced to something bordering on despair. So my first lesson is the strength of the weak.

II. My next is the delay of deliverance.

Peter had been in prison for some time before the Passover, and the praying had been going on all the while, and there was no answer. Day after day ‘of the unleavened bread’ and of the festival was slipping away. The last night had come; ‘and the same night’ the light shone, and the angel appeared. Why did Jesus Christ not hear the cry of these poor suppliants sooner? For their sakes; for Peter’s sake; for our sakes; for His own sake. For the eventual intervention, at the very last moment, and yet at a sufficiently early moment, tested faith. And look how beautifully all bore the test. The Apostle who was to be killed to-morrow is lying quietly sleeping in his cell. Not a very comfortable pillow he had to lay his head upon, with a chain on each arm and a legionary on each side of him. But he slept; and whilst he was asleep Christ was awake, and the brethren were awake. Their faith was tested, and it stood the test, and thereby was strengthened. And Peter’s patience and faith, being tested in like manner and in like manner standing the test, were deepened and confirmed. Depend upon it, he was a better man all his days, because he had been brought

close up to Death and looked it in the fleshless eye-sockets, unwinking and unterrified. And I dare say if, long after, he had been asked, 'Would you not have liked to have escaped those two or three days of suspense, and to have been let go at an earlier moment?' he would have said, 'Not for worlds! For I learned in those days that my Lord's time is the best. I learned patience'—a lesson which Peter especially needed—'and I learned trust.'

Do you remember another incident, singularly parallel in essence, though entirely unlike in circumstances, to this one? The two weeping sisters at Bethany send their messenger across the Jordan, grudging every moment that he takes to travel to the far-off spot where Jesus is. The message sent is only this: 'He whom Thou lovest is sick.' What an infinite trust in Christ's heart that form of the message showed! They would not say 'Come!'; they would not ask Him to do anything; they did not think that to do so was needful: they were quite sure that what He would do would be right.

And how was the message received? 'Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.' Well, did that not make Him hurry as fast as He could to the bedside? No; it rooted Him to the spot. 'He abode, *therefore*'—because He loved them—'two days still in the same place where He was,' to give him plenty of time to die, and the sisters plenty of time to test their confidence in Him. Their confidence does not seem to have altogether stood the test. 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.' 'And why wast Thou *not* here?' is implied. Christ's time was the best time. It was better to get a dead brother back to their arms and to their house than that they should not have

lost him for those dreary four days. So delay tests faith, and makes the deliverance, when it comes, not only the sweeter, but the more conspicuously divine. So, brother, 'men ought always to pray, and not to faint'—always to trust that 'the Lord will help them, and that right early.'

III. The next lesson that I would suggest is the leisureliness of the deliverance.

A prisoner escaping might be glad to make a bolt for it, dressed or undressed, anyhow. But when the angel comes into the cell, and the light shines, look how slowly and, as I say, leisurely, he goes about it. 'Put on thy shoes.' He had taken them off, with his girdle and his upper garment, that he might lie the less uncomfortably. 'Put on thy shoes; lace them; make them all right. Never mind about these two legionaries; they will not wake. Gird thyself; tighten thy girdle. Put on thy garment. Do not be afraid. Do not be in a hurry; there is plenty of time. Now, are you ready? Come!' It would have been quite as easy for the angel to have whisked him out of the cell and put him down at Mary's door; but that was not to be the way. Peter was led past all the obstacles—'the first ward,' and the soldiers at it; 'the second ward,' and the soldiers at it; 'and the third gate that leads into the city,' which was no doubt bolted and barred. There was a leisurely procession through the prison.

Why? Because Omnipotence is never in a hurry, and God, not only in His judgments but in His mercies, very often works slowly, as becomes His majesty. 'Ye shall not go out with haste; nor go by flight, for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel shall be your rereward.' We are impatient, and hurry our work over; God works slowly; for He works certainly.

That is the law of the divine working in all regions; and we have to regulate the pace of our eager expectation so as to fall in with the slow, solemn march of the divine purposes, both in regard to our individual salvation and the providences that affect us individually, and in regard to the world's deliverance from the world's evils. 'An inheritance may be gotten hastily in the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.' 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

IV. We see here, too, the delivered prisoner left to act for himself as soon as possible.

As long as the angel was with Peter, he was dazed and amazed. He did not know—and small blame to him—whether he was sleeping or waking; but he gets through the gates, and out into the empty street, glimmering in the morning twilight, and the angel disappears, and the slumbering city is lying around him. When he is *left* to himself, he *comes* to himself. He could not have passed the wards without a miracle, but he can find his way to Mary's house without one. He needed the angel to bring him as far as the gate and down into the street, but he did not need him any longer. So the angel vanished into the morning light, and then he felt himself, and steadied himself, when responsibility came to him. That is the thing to sober a man. So he stood in the middle of the unpeopled street, and 'he considered the thing,' and found in his own wits sufficient guidance, so that he did not miss the angel. He said to himself, 'I will go to Mary's house.' Probably he did not know that there were any praying there, but it was near, and it was, no doubt, convenient in other respects that we do not know of. The economy of miraculous power is a remarkable feature in Scriptural miracles. God never

does anything for us that we could do for ourselves. Not but that our doing for ourselves is, in a deeper sense, His working on us and in us, but He desires us to take the share that belongs to us in completing the deliverance which must begin by supernatural intervention of a Mightier than the angel, even the Lord of angels.

And so this little picture of the angel leading Peter through the prison, and then leaving him to his own common sense and courage as soon as he came out into the street, is just a practical illustration of the great text, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you.'

THE ANGEL'S TOUCH

'And, behold, the angel of the Lord . . . smote Peter. . . . 23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him [Herod].'—Acts xii. 7, 23.

THE same heavenly agent performs the same action on Peter and on Herod. To the one, his touch brings freedom and the dropping off of his chains; to the other it brings gnawing agonies and a horrible death. These twofold effects of one cause open out wide and solemn thoughts, on which it is well to look.

I. The one touch has a twofold effect.

So it is always when God's angels come, or God Himself lays His hand on men. Every manifestation of the divine power, every revelation of the divine presence, all our lives' experiences, are charged with the solemn possibility of bringing us one or other of

two directly opposite results. They all offer us an alternative, a solemn 'either—or.'

The Gospel too comes charged with that double possibility, and is the intensest and most fateful example of the dual effect of all God's messages and dealings. Just as the ark maimed Dagon and decimated the Philistine cities and slew Uzzah, but brought blessing and prosperity to the house of Obed-edom, just as the same pillar was light to Israel all the night long, but cloud and darkness to the Egyptians, so is Christ set 'for the fall of' some and 'for the rising of' others amidst the 'many in Israel,' and His Gospel is either 'the savour of life unto life or of death unto death,' but in both cases is in itself 'unto God,' one and the same 'sweet savour in Christ.'

II. These twofold effects are parts of one plan and purpose.

Peter's liberation and Herod's death tended in the same direction—to strengthen and conserve the infant Church, and thus to prepare the way for the conquering march of the Gospel. And so it is in all God's self-revelations and manifested energies, whatever may be their effects. They come from one source and one motive, they are fundamentally the operations of one changeless Agent, and, as they are one in origin and character, so they are one in purpose. We are not to separate them into distinct classes and ascribe them to different elements in the divine nature, setting down this as the work of Love and that as the outcome of Wrath, or regarding the acts of deliverance as due to one part of that great whole and the acts of destruction as due to another part of it. The angel was the same, and his celestial fingers were moved by the same calm, celestial will when

he smote Peter into liberty and life, and Herod to death.

God changes His ways, but not His heart. He changes His acts, but not His purposes. Opposite methods conduce to one end, as winter storms and June sunshine equally tend to the yellowed harvest.

III. The character of the effects depends on the men who are touched.

As is the man, so is the effect of the angel's touch. It could only bring blessing to the one who was the friend of the angel's Lord, and it could bring only death to the other, who was His enemy. It could do nothing to the Apostle but cause his chains to drop from his wrists, nor anything to the vainglorious king but bring loathsome death.

This, too, is a universal truth. It is we ourselves who settle what God's words and acts will be to us. The trite proverb, 'One man's meat is another man's poison,' is true in the highest regions. It is eminently, blessedly or tragically true in our relation to the Gospel, wherein all God's self-revelation reaches its climax, wherein 'the arm of the Lord' is put forth in its most blessed energy, wherein is laid on each of us the touch, tender and more charged with blessing than that of the angel who smote the calmly sleeping Apostle. That Gospel may either be to us the means of freeing us from our chains, and leading us out of our prison-house into sunshine and security, or be the fatal occasion of condemnation and death. Which it shall be depends on ourselves. Which shall I make it for myself?

‘SOBER CERTAINTY’

‘And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.’—ACTS xii. 11.

WHERE did Luke get his information of Peter’s thoughts in that hour? This verse sounds like first-hand knowledge. Not impossibly John Mark may have been his informant, for we know that both were in Rome together at a later period. In any case, it is clear that, through whatever channels this piece of minute knowledge reached Luke, it must have come originally from Peter himself. And what a touch of naturalness and evident truth it is! No wonder that the Apostle was half dazed as he came from his dungeon, through the prison corridors and out into the street. To be awakened by an angel, and to have such following experiences, would amaze most men.

I. The bewilderment of the released captive.

God’s mercies often come suddenly, and with a rush and a completeness that outrun our expectations and our power of immediate comprehension. And sometimes He sends us sorrows in such battalions and so overwhelming that we are dazed for the moment. A Psalmist touched a deep experience when he sang, ‘When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like unto them that dream.’

The angel has to be gone before we are sure that he was really here. The tumult of emotion in an experience needs to be calmed down before we understand the experience. Reflection discovers more of heaven and of God in the great moments of our lives

than was visible to us while we were living through them.

There is one region in which this is especially true—that of the religious life. There sometimes attend its beginnings in a soul a certain excitement and perturbation which disable from calm realising of the greatness of the change which has passed. And it is well when that excitement is quieted down and succeeded by meditative reflection on the treasures that have been poured into the lap, almost as in the dark. No man understands what he has received when he first receives Christ and Christ's gifts. It occupies a lifetime to take possession of that which we possess from the first in Him, and the oldest saint is as far from full possession of the unspeakable and infinite 'gift of God,' as the babes in Christ are.

But, looking more generally at this characteristic of not rightly understanding the great epochs of our lives till they are past, we may note that, while in part it is inevitable and natural, there is an element of fault in it. If we lived in closer fellowship with God, we should live in an atmosphere of continual calm, and nothing, either sorrowful or joyful, would be able so to sweep us off our feet that we should be bewildered by it. Astonishment would never so fill our souls as that we could not rightly appraise events, nor should we need any time, even in the thick of the most wonderful experiences, to 'come to' ourselves and discern the angel.

But if it be so that our lives disclose their meanings best, when we look back on them, how much of the understanding of them, and the drawing of all its sweetness out of each event in them, is entrusted to memory! And how negligent of a great means of

happiness and strength we are, if we do not often muse on 'all the way by which God the Lord has led us these many years in the wilderness'! It is needful for Christian progress to 'forget the things that are behind,' and not to let them limit our expectations nor prescribe our methods, but it is quite as needful to remember our past, or rather God's past with us, in order to confirm our grateful faith and enlarge our boundless hope.

II. The disappearance of the angel.

Why did he leave Peter standing there, half dazed and with his deliverance incomplete? He 'led him through one street' only, and 'straightway departed from him.' The Apostle delivered by miracle has now to use his brains. One distinguishing characteristic of New Testament miracles is their economy of miraculous power. Jesus raised Lazarus, for He alone could do that, but other hands must 'loose him and let him go.' He gave life to Jairus's little daughter, but He bid others 'give her something to eat.' God does nothing for us that we can do for ourselves. That economy was valuable as a preservative of the Apostles from the possible danger of expecting or relying on miracles, and as stirring them to use their own energies. Reliance on divine power should not lead us to neglect ordinary means. Alike in the natural and in the spiritual life we have to do our part, and to be sure that God will do His.

III. The symbol here of a greater deliverance.

Fancy may legitimately employ this story as setting forth for us under a lovely image the facts of Christian death, if only we acknowledge that such a use is entirely the work of fancy. But, making that acknowledgment, may we not make the use? Is not

Death, too, God's messenger to souls that love Him, 'mighty and beauteous, though his face be hid'? Would it not be more Christian-like, and more congruous with our eternal hope, if we pictured him thus than by the hideous emblems of our cemeteries and tombs? He comes to Christ's servants, and his touch is gentle though his fingers are icy-cold. He removes only the chains that bind us, and we ourselves are emancipated by his touch. He leads us to 'the iron gate that leadeth into the city,' and it opens to us 'of its own accord.' But he disappears as soon as our happy feet have touched the pavement of that street of the city which is 'pure gold, as transparent as glass,' and in the midst of which flows the river of the crystal-bright 'water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Then, when we see the Face as of the sun shining in his strength, we shall come to ourselves, and 'know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel and delivered' us from all our foes and ills for evermore.

RHODA

'A damsel . . . named Rhoda,'—ACTS xii. 13.

'RHODA' means 'a rose,' and *this* rose has kept its bloom for eighteen hundred years, and is still sweet and fragrant! What a lottery undying fame is! Men will give their lives to earn it; and this servant-girl got it by one little act, and never knew that she had it, and I suppose she does not know to-day that, every-

where throughout the whole world where the Gospel is preached, 'this that she hath done is spoken of as a memorial to her.' Is the love of fame worthy of being called 'the last infirmity of noble minds'? Or is it the delusion of ignoble ones? Why need we care whether anybody ever hears of us after we are dead and buried, so long as God knows about us? The 'damsel named Rhoda' was little the better for the immortality which she had unconsciously won.

Now there is a very singular resemblance between the details of this incident and those of another case, when Peter was recognised in dim light by his voice, and the Evangelist Luke, who is the author of the Acts of the Apostles, seems to have had the resemblance between the two scenes — that in the high priest's palace and that outside Mary's door — in his mind, because he uses in this narrative a word which occurs, in the whole of the New Testament, only here and in his account of what took place on that earlier occasion. In both instances a maid-servant recognises Peter by his voice, and in both 'she constantly affirms' that it was so. I do not think that there is anything to be built upon the resemblance, but at all events I think that the use of the same unusual word in the two cases, and nowhere else, seems to suggest that Luke felt how strangely events sometimes double themselves; and how the Apostle who is here all but a martyr is re-enacting, with differences, something like the former scene, when he was altogether a traitor. But, be that as it may, there are some lessons which we may gather from this vivid picture of Rhoda and her behaviour on the one side of the door, while Peter stood hammering, in the morning twilight, on the other.

I. We may notice in the relations of Rhoda to the assembled believers a striking illustration of the new bond of union supplied by the Gospel.

Rhoda was a slave. The word rendered in our version 'damsel' means a female slave. Her name, which is a Gentile name, and her servile condition, make it probable that she was not a Jewess. If one might venture to indulge in a guess, it is not at all unlikely that her mistress, Mary, John Mark's mother, Barnabas' sister, a well-to-do woman of Jerusalem, who had a house large enough to take in the members of the Church in great numbers, and to keep up a considerable establishment, had brought this slave-girl from the island of Cyprus. At all events, she was a slave. In the time of our Lord, and long after, these relations of slavery brought an element of suspicion, fear, and jealous espionage into almost every Roman household, because every master knew that he passed his days and nights among men and women who wanted nothing better than to wreak their vengeance upon him. A man's foes were eminently those of his own household. And now here this child-slave, a Gentile, has been touched by the same mighty love as her mistress; and Mary and Rhoda were kneeling together in the prayer-meeting when Peter began to hammer at the door. Neither woman thought now of the unnatural, unwholesome relation which had formerly bound them. In God's good time, and by the slow process of leavening society with Christian ideas, that diabolical institution perished in Christian lands. Violent reformation of immoralities is always a blunder. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' Settlers in forest lands have found that it is endless work to grub up the trees, or even to fell them. 'Root

and branch' reform seldom answers. The true way is to girdle the tree by taking off a ring of bark round the trunk, and letting nature do the rest. Dead trees are easily dealt with; living ones blunt many axes and tire many arms, and are alive after all. Thus the Gospel waged no direct war with slavery, but laid down principles which, once they are wrought into Christian consciousness, made its continuance impossible. But, pending that consummation, the immediate action of Christianity was to ameliorate the condition of the slave. The whole aspect of the ugly thing was changed as soon as master and slave together became the slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel has the same sort of work to do to-day, and there are institutions in full flourishing existence in this and every other civilised community as entirely antagonistic to the spirit and principles of Christianity as Roman slavery was. I, for my part, believe that the one uniting bond and healing medicine for society is found in Jesus Christ; and that in Him, and that the principles deducible from His revelation by word and work, applied to all social evils, are their cure, and their only cure. That slight, girlish figure standing at the door of Mary, her slave and yet her sister in Christ, may be taken as pointing symbolically the way by which the social and civic evils of this day are to be healed, and the war of classes to cease.

II. Note how we get here a very striking picture of the sacredness and greatness of small common duties.

Rhoda came out from the prayer-meeting to open the gate. It was her business, as we say, 'to answer the door,' and so she left off praying to go and do it. So doing, she was the means of delivering the Apostle

from the danger which still dogged him. It was of little use to be praying on one side of the shut door when on the other he was standing in the street, and the day was beginning to dawn; Herod's men would be after him as soon as daylight disclosed his escape. The one thing needful for him was to be taken in and sheltered. So the praying group and the girl who stops praying when she hears the knock, to which it was her business to attend, were working in the same direction. It is not necessary to insist that no heights or delights of devotion and secret communion are sufficient excuses for neglecting or delaying the doing of the smallest and most menial task which is our task. If your business is to keep the door, you will not be leaving, but abiding in, the secret place of the Most High, if you get up from your knees in the middle of your prayer, and go down to open it. The smallest, commonest acts of daily life are truer worship than is rapt and solitary communion or united prayer, if the latter can only be secured by the neglect of the former. Better to be in the lower parts of the house attending to the humble duties of the slave than to be in the upper chamber, uniting with the saints in supplication and leaving tasks unperformed.

Let us remember how we may find here an illustration of another great truth, that the smallest things, done in the course of the quiet discharge of recognised duty, and being, therefore, truly worship of God, have in them a certain quality of immortality, and may be eternally commemorated. It was not only the lofty and unique expression of devotion, which another woman gave when she broke the alabaster box to anoint the feet of the Saviour which were to be pierced with nails to-morrow, that has been held worthy of

undying remembrance. The name and act of a poor slave girl have been commemorated by that Spirit who preserves nothing in vain, in order that we should learn that things which we vulgarly call great, and those which we insolently call small, are regarded by Him, not according to their apparent magnitude, but according to their motive and reference to Him. He says, 'I will never forget any of their works'; and this little deed of Rhoda's, like the rose petals that careful housekeepers in the country keep upon the sideboard in china bowls to diffuse a fragrance through the room, is given us to keep in memory for ever, a witness of the sanctity of common life when filled with acts of obedience to Him.

III. The same figure of the 'damsel named Rhoda' may give us a warning as to the possibility of forgetting very plain duties under the pressure of very legitimate excitement.

'She opened not the door for gladness,' but ran in and told them. And if, whilst she was running in with her message, Herod's quaternions of soldiers had come down the street, there would have been 'no small stir' in the church as to 'what had become of Peter.' He would have gone back to his prison sure enough. Her *first* duty was to open the door; her *second* one was to go and tell the brethren, 'we have got him safe inside'; but in the rush of joyous emotions she naively forgot what her first business was, 'lost her head,' as we say, and so went off to tell that he was outside, instead of letting him in. Now joy and sorrow are equally apt to make us forget plain and pressing duties, and we may learn from this little incident the old-fashioned, but always necessary advice, to keep feeling well under control, to use it as impulse,

not as guide, and never to let emotion, which should be down in the engine-room, come on deck and take the helm. It is dangerous to obey feeling, unless its decrees are countersigned by calm common sense illuminated by Scripture. Sorrow is apt to obscure duty by its darkness, and joy to do so by its dazzle. It is hard to see the road at midnight, or at midday when the sun is in our eyes. Both need to be controlled. Duty remains the same, whether my heart is beating like a sledge-hammer, or whether 'my bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne.' Whether I am sad or glad, the door that God has given me to watch has to be opened and shut by me. And whether I am a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, like Rhoda in Mary's, or have an office that people think larger and more important, the imperativeness of my duties is equally independent of my momentary emotions and circumstances. Remember, then, that duty remains while feeling fluctuates, and that, sorrowful or joyful, we have still the same Lord to serve and the same crown to win.

IV. Lastly, we have here an instance of a very modest but positive and fully-warranted trust in one's own experience in spite of opposition.

I need not speak about that extraordinary discussion which the brethren got up in the upper room. They had been praying, as has often been remarked, for Peter's deliverance, and now that he is delivered they will not believe it. I am afraid that there is often a dash of unbelief in immediate answers to our prayers mingling with the prayers. And although the petitions in this case were intense and fervent, as the original tells us, and had been kept up all night long, and although their earnestness and worthiness are guaranteed by the fact that they were answered, yet

when the veritable Peter, in flesh and blood, stood before the door, the suppliants first said to the poor girl, 'Thou art mad,' and then, 'It is his angel! It cannot be he.' Nobody seems to have thought of going to the door to see whether it was he or not, but they went on arguing with Rhoda as to whether she was right or wrong. The unbelief that alloys even golden faith is taught us in this incident.

Rhoda 'constantly affirmed that it was so,' like the other portress that had picked out Peter's voice amongst the men huddled round the fire in the high priest's chamber.

The lesson is—trust your own experience, whatever people may have to say against it. If you have found that Jesus Christ can help you, and has loved you, and that your sins have been forgiven, because you have trusted in Him, do not let anybody laugh or talk you out of that conviction. If you cannot argue, do like Rhoda, 'constantly affirm that it is so.' That is the right answer, especially if you can say to the antagonistic party, 'Have you been down to the door, then, to see?' And if they have to say 'No!' then the right answer is, 'You go and look as I did, and you will come back with the same belief which I have.'

So at last they open the door and there he stands. Peter's hammer, hammer, hammer at the gate is wonderfully given in the story. It goes on as a kind of running accompaniment through the talk between Rhoda and the friends. It might have put a stop to the conversation, one would have thought. But Another stands at the door knocking, still more persistently, still more patiently. 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door I will come in.'

PETER AFTER HIS ESCAPE

'But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him forth out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.'—ACTS xii. 17.

WHEN the angel 'departed from him,' Peter had to fall back on his own wits, and they served him well. He 'considered the thing,' and resolved to make for the house of Mary. He does not seem to have intended to remain there, so dangerously near Herod, but merely to have told its inmates of his deliverance, and then to have hidden himself somewhere, till the heat of the hunt after him was abated. Apparently he did not go into the house at all, but talked to the brethren, when they came trooping after Rhoda to open the gate. The signs of haste in the latter part of the story, where Peter has to think and act for himself, contrast strikingly with the majestic leisureliness of the action of the angel, who gave his successive commands to him to dress completely, as if careless of the sleeping legionaries who might wake at any moment. There was need for haste, for the night was wearing thin, and the streets of Jerusalem were no safe promenade for a condemned prisoner, escaped from his guards.

We do not deal here with the scene in Mary's house and at the gate. We only note, in a word, the touch of nature in Rhoda's forgetting to open 'for gladness,' and so leaving Peter in peril, if a detachment of his guards had already been told off to chase him.

Equally true to nature, alas, is the incredulity of the praying 'many,' when the answer to their prayers was sent to them. They had rather believe that the poor girl was 'mad' or that, for all their praying, Peter was dead, and this was his 'angel,' than that their intense prayer had been so swiftly and completely answered. Is their behaviour not a mirror in which we may see our own?

Very like Peter, as well as very intelligible in the circumstances, is it that he 'continued knocking.' Well he might, and evidently his energetic fusillade of blows was heard even above the clatter of eager tongues, discussing Rhoda's astonishing assertions. Some one, at last, seems to have kept his head sufficiently to suggest that perhaps, instead of disputing whether these were true or not, it might be well to go to the door and see. So they all went in a body, Rhoda being possibly afraid to go alone, and others afraid to stay behind, and there they saw his veritable self. But we notice that there is no sign of his being taken in and refreshed or cared for. He waved an imperative hand, to quiet the buzz of talk, spoke two or three brief words, and departed.

I. Note Peter's account of his deliverance.

We have often had occasion to remark that the very keynote of this Book of Acts is the working of Christ from heaven, which to its writer is as real and efficient as was His work on earth. Peter here traces his deliverance to 'the Lord.' He does not stay to mention the angel. His thoughts went beyond the instrument to the hand which wielded it. Nor does he seem to have been at all astonished at his deliverance. His moment of bewilderment, when he did not know whether he was dreaming or awake, soon

passed, and as soon as 'the sober certainty of his waking bliss' settled on his mind, his deliverance seemed to him perfectly natural. What else was it to be expected that 'the Lord' would do? Was it not just like Him? There was nothing to be astonished at, there was everything to be thankful for. That is how Christian hearts should receive the deliverances which the Lord is still working for them.

II. Note Peter's message to the brethren.

James, the Lord's brother, was not an Apostle. That he should have been named to receive the message indicates that already he held some conspicuous position, perhaps some office, in the Church. It may also imply that there were no Apostles in Jerusalem then. We note also that the 'many' who were gathered in Mary's house can have been only a small part of the whole. We here get a little glimpse into the conditions of the life of a persecuted Church, which a sympathetic imagination can dwell on till it is luminous. Such gatherings as would attract notice had to be avoided, and what meetings were held had to be in private houses and with shut doors, through which entrance was not easy. Mary's 'door' had a 'gate' in it, and only that smaller postern, which admitted but one at a time, was opened to visitors, and that after scrutiny. But though assemblies were restricted, communications were kept up, and by underground ways information of events important to the community spread through its members. The consciousness of brotherhood was all the stronger because of the common danger, the universal peril had not made the brethren selfish, but sympathetic. We may note, too, how great a change had come since the time when the Christians were in favour with all the people,

and may reflect how fickle are the world's smiles for Christ's servants.

III. Note Peter's disappearance.

All that is said of it is that he 'went into another place.' Probably Luke did not know where he went. It would be prudent at the time to conceal it, and the habit of concealment may have survived the need for it. But two points suggest themselves in regard to the Apostle's flight. There may be a better use for an Apostle than to kill him, and Christ's boldest witnesses are sometimes bound to save themselves by fleeing into another city. To hide oneself 'till the calamity be overpast' may be rank cowardice or commendable prudence. All depends on the circumstances of each case. Prudence is an element in courage, and courage without it is fool-hardiness. There are outward dangers from which it is Christian duty to run, and there are outward dangers which it is Christian duty to face. There are inward temptations which it is best to avoid, as there are others which have to be fought to the death. Peter was as brave and braver when he went and hid himself, than when he boasted, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I!' A morbid eagerness for martyrdom wrought much harm in the Church at a later time. The primitive Church was free from it.

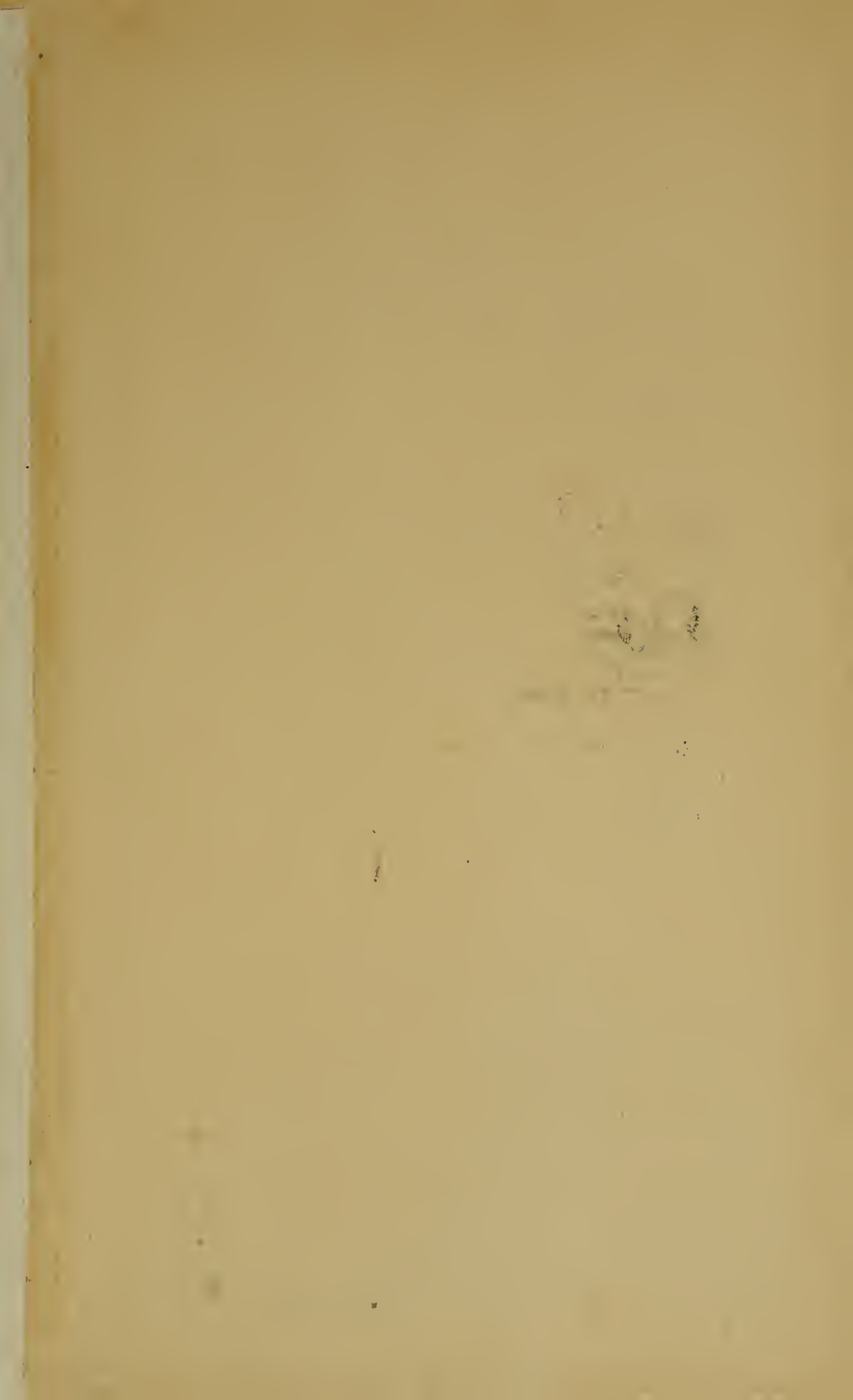
But we must not omit to note that here Peter is dropped out of the history, and is scarcely heard of any more. We have a glimpse of him in chapter xv., at the Council in Jerusalem, but, with that exception, this is the last mention of him in Acts. How little this Book cares for its heroes! Or rather how it has only one Hero, and one Name which it celebrates,

the name of that Lord to whom Peter ascribed his deliverance, and of whom he himself declared that 'there is none other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.'

END OF VOL. I.

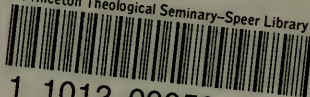
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The Acts of the Apostles.

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